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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a transcendental argument to establish the existence of objectively necessary and categorical moral principles. The strategy followed might be called Analytic-Hegelian. It traces the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concepts at the heart of our philosophical endeavours, thereby reversing the line of development of the primary formation of concepts; and culminates in a self-recognition of the subject as a being for whom certain moral principles objectively and categorically hold.

Chapter One shows that refutations of radical empiricism which take the concept of experience for granted, fail. Chapter Two examines the concept of experience required for empiricism to be possible. Chapter Three, investigating the necessary conditions of the possibility of this concept (rather than of experience itself), shows that empiricist scepticism is possible only if there exists an objective reality populated by items independent of experience. Empiricist scepticism is incoherent.

Chapter Four deals with beginning philosophy. Some possible starting-points are considered, before discussing the concept of thought required for critical philosophy to be possible. The necessary conditions of the possibility of this concept include the existence of the external world, and (Chapter Five) of thinking, speaking subjects. The relationship between thought and language is elucidated. Chapter Six shows that the grasp of the thinking subject requires the subject to be engaged in communication, and to be a subject for whom communication is a value. Chapter Seven shows that the principle of maintaining communication is necessarily presupposed as an objectively necessary and categorical moral principle by anyone who questions it. It is thus unchallengeable. It serves, furthermore, as the foundation for a substantive non-relativistic ethics, with universal application. The transcendental foundation of ethics has been established.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL FOUNDATION OF ETHICS

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to the University of Durham

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ATTEMPTED REFUTATIONS OF RADICAL EMPIRICISM

#### Introduction

This chapter serves as a prologue to the main argument. It considers arguments which claim to show that empiricism is incoherent. Empiricism is understood here primarily in its critical function, interrogating claims to knowledge on the basis of a recognition that how things are experienced as being need not happily coincide with how they really are. The sceptical challenges that empiricism lays down are well-known; when taken to their limit, they seem to leave the radical empiricist with the claim that perhaps all there is, is experience (even experience of the present moment), and nothing else. It is the composite of this claim and its attendant scepticism that I refer to by the term 'radical empiricism'. Each of the arguments discussed aims to show that this claim is in some sense incoherent, and the sceptical cutting edge of empiricism thereby limited in its application.

I take up these arguments for two reasons. First; I hope to show that the arguments, which to some extent represent three major anti-empiricist trends in modern English-language philosophy, with sources in Kant's Transcendental Deduction, Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument, and the theory of meaning expounded by Davidson and others, nevertheless fail to address themselves to the heart of radical empiricism. Second;



in discussing and criticising the three kinds of argument, I hope to distance them from my own argument in Part One, which is also to the effect that radical empiricism is incoherent. I would not think this argument worth the trouble, if it did not lead on to further, more significant, conclusions.

### Empiricism and the Bounds of Sense

In this book <sup>1</sup>. Professor Strawson seeks to renew the Kantian enterprise, stripping off the speculative aberrations of Transcendental Idealism to reveal that hard core of argument which constitutes its analytic essence. Part of what remains is held to amount to a refutation of that radical empiricism which holds that it is possible that all there is, is experience, and that the existence of an independent world populated by material objects is open to doubt. Though fifteen years old and widely discussed, The Bounds of Sense remains a locus classicus for the modern Kantian movement against empiricist scepticism. It is important therefore to identify and examine any central presuppositions which have so far escaped sustained attention, and in considering Strawson's account of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, I wish to show that he does not oppose, but rather presupposes the basis of radical empiricism, and hence is incapable of escaping its limits or its attendant scepticism.

For Strawson, the Transcendental Deduction results in us favourably entertaining the conclusion that, as a necessary

condition of the possibility of experience, experience itself "must have such internal, concept-carried connectedness as to constitute it (at least in part) a course of experience of an objective world". (p.117) This is "the thesis of objectivity". (p.24) Let us first notice an ambiguity in the phrase "experience of an objective world", since Strawson never explicitly concerns himself with it. The "of" here could be merely intentional, in the Scholastic and Husserlian sense, indicating that it must, at least, seem in experience that there are independent objects in an objective world, whether or not such objects, or such a world, exist. Thus even if we suspend judgment as to their actual existence, experience is still of objects in an objective world in this intentional sense. Alternatively, the "of" could indicate a full-blown, successful cognitive relation between the experiencing subject and the actually existing objective world it experiences, as is presupposed by our ordinary talk of seeing and otherwise perceiving things.

On first reading it seems as though Strawson is addressing the objectivity thesis under the first interpretation, as concerned merely with the internal structure of experience. For consider this elucidation of the conclusion:

The minimum implied (by the dual character of experience as requiring both particular 'intuitions' and general concepts for their 'recognition') is that some at least of the concepts under which particular items are recognised as falling should be such that the experiences themselves contain the basis for certain allied distinctions: individually, the distinction of a subjective component within a judgement of experience ... collectively, the distinction between the subjective order and arrangement of a series of such experiences on the one hand and the objective order and arrangement of the items of which they are experiences on the other.

(p.101)

The argument here seems to be aimed at establishing that experience must have a certain internal character: the subjective/objective distinction must be made within experience, by using concepts, in which the distinction is implicit, to recognise the particular items of experience (the internal 'accusatives' p.98) as being of such and such a kind. In Husserl's terms, experience must be (at least in part) intentionally of an objective world. This reading is reinforced by the way Strawson takes as his main opponent the sense-datum theorist, descendant of the classical empiricists, who supposes that there could be experience articulated entirely in terms of concepts of items such that 'there was no distinction to be drawn between the order and arrangement of the objects (and of their particular features and characteristics) and the order and arrangement of the subject's experiences of awareness of them'. (p.99) It is this possibility which the Transcendental Deduction is to rule out.

If this interpretation is correct, then a brief comparison with the self-styled radical empiricist Husserl will show that, while damaging to classical empiricism, Strawson's account leaves the radical empiricist essentially unscathed.<sup>2</sup> Husserl, drawing on the Cartesian foundation of reflection on the cogitatio, the pure experience, as that alone which is apodictically given, distinguishes between experiences which are, intentionally, of objects like cats which exist independently of the experience itself, and experiences which are, intentionally, of objects like after-images or tickling sensations which do not exist independently of the experience itself.<sup>3</sup> For Husserl, this

distinction can be made within experience, under suspension of judgement as to whether an objective world actually exists. What Strawson, following Kant, has shown is that this distinction must be made within experience, if there is to be any experience at all, and that this is effected through the employment, within experience, of concepts of the objective. This seems to leave open the question of the actual existence of anything independent of experience, and, of course, Kant himself insists that all he can rightly claim is that experience must have a certain internal conceptual structure, and that nothing can be said of whatever is beyond the realm of experience. But Strawson seems not to accept this:

The analytical argument to conclusions about the necessary structure of experience must be evaluated on its own merits. If we accept the conclusion that experience necessarily involves awareness of objects conceived of as existing in time independently of any particular states of awareness of them, then we must accept it without reservation. We have no extraneous standard or scheme in terms of which we can give an esoteric sense to the question whether such objects really exist, as we must empirically conceive of them as existing, independently of our perceptions.

(p.261-2)

Here Strawson seems to reject the radical empiricist notion that it is possible that only experience actually exists. For we can give sense to the question of whether purportedly independent objects actually exist, only within our conceptual scheme, and the answer it receives is a commonplace affirmative. It now appears that the phrase "experience of the objective world" is to be

understood as indicating the actual existence of such a world, with which some cognitive consummation is effected. But consider this further. The context of Strawson's injunction is a discussion of Transcendental Idealism in which he dismisses both Kant's transcendental contrast between things as they appear and things as they are in themselves, and the accompanying metaphysics of the affection of our faculties by things-in-themselves which generates our representations. As earlier critics remarked, this theory involves an extension of the application of the categories beyond the realm of experience, an extension ruled out as incoherent by Kant's own 'principle of significance' (cf. p.16). We do not, and cannot, have any scheme in which we could speak of how things really are in the sense of Kant's Transcendental Idealism. It is from this critique that Strawson's claim that we can rely only on the conceptual scheme we do, and must, employ in experience, gains its strength. However, things are not so straightforward. Strawson refuses to go beyond the conceptual scheme which structures experience; questions of existence only make sense, and can only be settled, within that scheme.<sup>4</sup> But this refusal, and its supporting theory, themselves presuppose the validity of another sense of existence: that in which experience itself is held to exist.

For the validity of this prior sense of existence, in which experience is said to exist, must be presupposed before the Transcendental Deduction to the validity of the employment within experience of concepts of the objective can even begin.

The sense of the claim that there is experience cannot, then, itself presuppose the validity of that conceptual scheme. Indeed, within that scheme, it is a mere 'commonplace' that there is experience, on the part of bodily people engaged with the world and each other, but clearly neither Kant nor Strawson wishes to begin his deductions from such a point. The question as to what this prior sense of existence amounts to, indeed the whole issue of the presupposition of the validity of such a sense, is nowhere explicitly considered by Strawson; from the opening page he talks of experience in a way which assumes its existence to be entirely unproblematical. Seeking further elucidation we must turn to Kant himself, whose problems, and hence the presuppositions of whose problems, Strawson takes up. And in Kant, and even more in Husserl, it is clear that the sense in which experience exists is derived from Descartes. Experience is that which is immediately present, here and now, given with absolute certainty. So whilst rejecting Kant's double-aspect theory of objects - as they appear, and as they are in themselves - we can recognise the existence of a standard according to which we can ask whether the objective world really exists: that of immediate presence, which is accorded to experience itself. Nor is this standard merely "extraneous"; it is central to the Kantian, and so the Strawsonian, project. This emerges in Strawson's reformulation of the argument for the objectivity - thesis, which considers the "necessary self-reflexiveness" of experience as the "essential core of personal consciousness". (p.107):

For the necessity of saving the recognitional component in an experience from absorption into its sensible accusative (and thereby saving the status of the experience as experience [sc. as having the dual character mentioned earlier] ) is simply identical with the necessity of providing room, in experience, for the thought of experience itself; and it is just this necessity which calls directly for the distinction between how things are and how they are experienced as being and hence for the employment, in judgements of experience (though not in every such judgement) of concepts of the objective.

(p.110-1)

In this important re-casting of the central argument Strawson allows himself to speak both of the concept (or "thought") of experience, and of experience itself, while with regard to the objective world we are to be satisfied with concepts only. This asymmetry, which rests on the unacknowledged and unquestioned sense of existence in which experience is assumed to exist, is surely the mark of the problem which the sceptic seizes on as the question of the actual existence of the objective world. For the sceptic demands the same high standard of immediate presence, and the accompanying apodictic certainty, accorded to experience. This is the fundamental sense of existence here, underlying both the objectivity-thesis and the principle of significance, and the restriction to the conceptual scheme necessarily employed within experience, grants only a second-rate Ersatz to the objective world. In Kant himself, while rejecting the mechanics of his Transcendental Idealism, we can see an attempt at dealing with a problem which Strawson fails to recognise.



It is possible that Strawson might balk at being told that he presupposes the existence of experience in the Cartesian sense, and reject the notion of experience as immediately given, though this would make less clear the interest which the concept of experience, indeed the whole Kantian epistemological project, has for him. Nor, given his failure to consider adequately Kant's Cartesian presuppositions, would this be a particularly graceful gesture. The central point, however, remains. There is a primary sense, however elucidated, of existence in which experience is taken to exist, and neither Kant nor Strawson have shown that the objective world exists in the same sense. Accounts with the sceptic remain to be settled.

We can conclude from this that the victim of Strawson's account of the Transcendental Deduction is classical empiricism and its descendants, especially sense-datum theories. This may indeed leave us with part of "the framework of a truly empiricist philosophy" (p.19), but we must recognise its limitations, in particular its failure to deal with radical empiricism. For both radical empiricism and Strawson's Kantian refutation presuppose a sense of existence, in which experience is assumed to exist. The overcoming of empiricist scepticism requires more philosophical self-reflection than is manifest in The Bounds of Sense. In particular it requires us to address such unacknowledged presuppositions. To unearth another of these, let us turn to a second argument against the radical empiricist.

## Empiricism and the Private Language Argument

One claim made for Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of a private language is that it shows the incoherence of the kind of radical empiricism which emerges from the Cartesian emphasis on the cogitatio as that which is indubitably given.<sup>5</sup>

In considering Anthony Kenny's article "Cartesian Privacy"

I want to show that such an empiricism - which holds that there is, perhaps, only the experience of the present moment - is not refuted by the PLA.<sup>6</sup> This is not because the PLA is itself invalid, but because such an empiricism need not be committed to the use of a language which is private in the relevant sense. For present purposes, then, we can put aside the question of the validity of the PLA, and the historical point that Descartes himself was committed to the possibility of a private language. We shall concentrate on the more ambitious claim mentioned above.

Kenny clearly feels that a Cartesian enquirer is committed to the use of a private language, arguing that "the referents of the words of Wittgenstein's private language correspond to Descartes' cogitationes" (p.361). Why should he think this?

If the language contains words for sensations, then the connection between the words and the sensations must be set up without the intermediary of the natural expression of sensation in bodily behaviour; for the words of the language are supposed to have meaning at a stage at which it is doubtful whether there are any bodies at all.

(p.362)

This deals explicitly only with words for sensations, which I shall consider later. First, let us look at words for ordinary

public objects, like cats. How does the Cartesian doubt affect them? Take a thought like 'There is a cat'. We must suspend judgement on such a claim, according to the Method of Doubt, since we cannot be sure that any material objects exist, let alone this particular purported cat. We must restrict ourselves to a claim like 'It seems that there is a cat': this is indubitable. Now what has happened to the meaning of 'cat' here? Has it changed, so that the word no longer refers to an ordinary public object, but to a private one - a certain complex of sense data, or a Lockean idea, say? This may have been the classical empiricists' view, and indeed that of Descartes himself, but is it the only view open to an empiricist? Again, for the self-styled radical empiricist, Edmund Husserl, the answer is no.<sup>7</sup>

This answer is based on the contention that the philosophically radical description of the object of the cogitatio is that which describes it exactly as it is experienced; or, as Husserl would also say, as it is "intended" in the experience. Such description of the "intentional objects" of experience can be undertaken under suspension of judgement as to the actual existence of the object in question, and plays a central role in Husserlian phenomenology. Consider, for example, my looking at a cat. Let us suspend judgement as to whether the cat actually exists or not. Nevertheless, the object of the experience is given, at least implicitly, as something which is alive and furry, which eats, drinks and so on: in short, it is given as a cat - my experience is, intentionally, of a cat. Now if someone convinces me that it is, in fact, a

cardboard replica of a cat, then, according to Husserl, my experience may undergo a gestalt switch. Even though nothing in the field of vision alters, my experience is now intentionally, not of a cat, but of a cardboard cut-out; it is given, at least implicitly, as inanimate and non-furry, requiring neither food nor drink, and so on. If I realise that I am enjoying the effects of an hallucinatory drug, and I am told that nothing but a blank wall stands before me, then again, though my visual field remains the same, the cogitatio may change; its intentional object is no longer given as a public object at all, but as a private hallucinatory image. Finally, if I attend purely to the sense qualities of the visual field, the experience is now, intentionally, of something stripped of all other meaning (either as public or private object); that is, of a spatial arrangement of patches of colour of different shade, intensity and so on.

Here the classical empiricist may claim that only this last description is philosophically radical, because it describes the basic experiential data, devoid of interpretation. Since all interpretations are essentially contestable constructions, only with this last attempt do we get the hard stuff of experience, the data which are given. Husserl denies this: for him the phenomenological mode of description is primary; and we can get to the supposedly neutral description, free of interpretation, only by a process of abstraction, stripping off the meanings given in experience and articulated in the phenomenological description.

Certain considerations seem to support Husserl here - for example, the way A.J. Ayer introduces his "percepts" by means, ultimately, of a locution like "it seems that there is a cat".<sup>8</sup> However, all we need at present is the weaker claim that the phenomenological description does not presuppose the "sense data" description as a condition of its meaningfulness. If this is the case (and I shall consider it again later) we can view the Cartesian doubt as suspending judgement about the actual existence of the intentional objects of our cogitationes (at least of those which are given as existing independently of the experience) while the cogitatio retains its phenomenological meaning. Nothing, as far as experiences goes, changes.

As for the language in which the description of the cogitatio is undertaken, the phenomenological standpoint gives us an important alternative. Instead of the Cartesian doubt forcing a change in our view of the meaning of words, such that they are taken to refer to immediate sensations, sense data and so forth, we can keep the meaning of the words unchanged, so that if they successfully refer, they refer to public objects like cats. The effect of the Doubt is to suspend judgement on the actual existence of these purported referents. Rather than change the meaning and secure successful reference, one leaves the meaning as it is, and suspends judgement on referential success. Now this surely removes one reason for thinking that a private language must be used here, for its words refer not to immediate private sensations, known only to the speaker, but (purportedly at least) to public objects which can be met with by others.<sup>9</sup> But the Doubt is to suspend judgement on the actual existence not only of the purported referents of the

words of the language, but also of the whole public context within which the publicity of meaning is attained. Does this not force us back onto a private language? No. The meaning of the words is still not private; it rests not on bare ostensive association with private sensations or ideas, but on a context of communication about a public world. If judgement as to the existence of this context is suspended, so as to treat it as the intentional correlate of pure experience within which the public/private distinction is drawn, the language remains public; it is in principle comprehensible to others, and its use is in principle open to their checking, whether or not such others actually exist. Thus for the radical empiricist it is possible that there actually exists only a series of experiences, among which are experiences intentionally of people communicating about material objects, responding positively or negatively to utterances, teaching the meanings of words and so on; providing, in short, the necessary context for the emergence of a public language. The publicity of meaning is thus adequately founded on the intentional character of such experiences, irrespective of the actual existence of such people and objects.

As long as we distinguish sense from reference, as any adequate theory of language must (although perhaps the theory of the classical empiricists does not), we can interpret the Doubt as above. Indeed, once the phenomenological alternative to classical empiricism is considered, this seems to me by far the most natural way of construing the effects of the Doubt, and if so, it secures for the reconstructed Cartesian an immunity to the PLA, which would apply only to less sophisticated forms of radical empiricism.<sup>10</sup> Before discussing further the viability of this option, let us ask why it is not considered by Kenny (and, for that matter, Wittgenstein).

One reason, hinted at above, is that Descartes and the classical empiricists seem to have held that a word must refer to something if it is to be meaningful, so that if we suspend judgement as to the existence of ordinary material objects we must turn elsewhere, to sense data and private sensations, to account for the meaningfulness of language. But it would be wrong to saddle radical empiricism in general with such an inadequate theory of language: Husserl, for one, having studied Frege, would reject it.

There is another reason, which is that the focus on the example of pain stops Kenny from seeing the alternative to classical empiricism. He quotes from Descartes' Sixth Meditation:

(I found error) not only in (judgements) founded on the external senses, but even in those founded on the internal as well: for is there anything more intimate or internal than pain? And yet I have learned from some persons whose arms or legs have been cut off, that they sometimes seemed to feel pain in the part which had been amputated, which made me think that I could not be quite certain that it was a certain member which pained me, even though I felt pain in it. <sup>11</sup>

Kenny continues: "In pain, as in sight, we must distinguish what is strictly cogitatio. The indubitable cogitatio will be the "immediate private sensation"" (p.362). Consider this further. Kenny clearly takes the application of Cartesian doubt to a claim like "There is a pain in the foot" to work like this; since we cannot be sure of the existence of the foot, all we are entitled to claim is "There is a pain", where "pain" now refers to a private sensation, independent of any actual foot, or body, at all - and so, of course, of any behavioural manifestation of sensation. "Pain" must on this view be part of a private language,

its meaning based on association with the private sensation, and so this interpretation of Cartesian doubt - which seems admittedly to be Descartes' own - falls prey to the PLA.

Our reconstructed Cartesian, however, has an alternative. Instead of "There is a pain", the application of the Doubt could as well give us "It seems that there is a pain in the foot", in line with its application to claims like "There is a cat". Here, "pain" remains part of a public language: a pain is the sort of feeling you get when someone, say, stamps on your foot, and which is manifest in screams, writhings, withdrawal of the foot and so on. So the pain is experienced as being in the foot, even though we suspend judgement as to the actual existence of that foot. The Doubt says that maybe there is no pain in the foot, it just seems that there is.

The temptation here is to say that there is more to it. Not only does it seem that there is a pain in the foot, there is a sensation, whether in an actual foot or not. So this might seem to be a more exact description of the case: "There is a pain, which seems to be in the foot". Certainly it seems to fit the amputated limb example. But must 'pain' here be part of a private language? Only if it supposedly gets its meaning through association with the bare sensation, independent of connections with the body and with behaviour. But this need not be the case. The empiricist has the option of saying that 'pain' is part of a public language, in that it has public meaning via the normal connections with body and behaviour. Within this setting, we can allow talk of pains which do not in fact have the location they seem to have; but such talk must be understood as parasitic on the normal situation. On this



view, Cartesian doubt is taken not to change the meaning of words, so that "pain" gets only a private sense, tied only to the bare, disconnected sensation, but to suspend judgement on the existence of the public objects in connection with which the word for pain gets its public meaning.

Again, this seems to me the most natural interpretation of the workings of the Doubt, and to rescue the radical empiricist from the claws of the PLA. Nevertheless, two objections must be discussed, which put in question the coherence of this variant of empiricism. The first concerns the possibility of the universal application of the distinction between how things are experienced as being and how things are, and so between successful and unsuccessful attempts at referring. It is said that the distinction works within the context of a generally "realist" framework - "realist" in that it assumes the existence of a reality independent of experience - but makes no sense when applied to that context itself, so as to suspend judgement on the existence of the material world in toto. For, the argument goes, there is no empirical cash-value at stake here, nothing in experience could count for or against either alternative, and so there is no meaningful distinction to be made. This can also be expressed by saying that, while we learn the distinction in situations where we recognise that what was experienced as being the case was not in fact the case, we cannot, in principle, get ourselves into such a situation with respect to the whole material world, and so the distinction is no longer meaningful.

Two points can be made in reply. First, this argument, which rests on a strongly verificationist criterion of meaningfulness, is separate from the PLA, and very controversial. It is, for example, a matter of contention whether the criterion escapes its own strictures, or rules itself out as meaningless. Secondly: if such an argument were to succeed, to ensure the PLA's hold on radical empiricism, it would render the PLA superfluous, since the argument would rule out radical empiricism on its own account.

The second objection focusses on another crucial presupposition of radical empiricism. The claim that a public language in which to describe experience can be retained, whilst commitment to the existence of a public world is suspended, necessarily presupposes the meaningfulness of talk about pure experience; and, correlatively, the availability of the concept of pure experience. This presupposition lies unacknowledged in the discourse of radical empiricism and the opponents so far discussed. What are the necessary conditions of the meaningfulness of such talk, and of the possibility of the very concept of experience? The crucial arguments concern not the language in which the world as experienced is described - as Kenny and Wittgenstein hold to be the case - but the possibility of the concept of experience itself.

In discussing this version of the PLA, and the Kantian argument presented by Strawson, the use of Husserl as a touchstone has shown how radical empiricism can survive their challenge. In each case we are told something about the kinds of concept that are necessarily employed in the articulation of experience, without addressing

directly the concept of experience itself. We could form a composite of the two, which would assert that experience must be articulated in concepts of the objective, the linguistic expression of which must have a public sense. But, as we have seen, this leaves us with the existence of experience in a sense unquestioned by either, and already explicitly presupposed by Strawson, which makes room for the sophisticated empiricists' sceptical challenge. The charge of incoherence made in these arguments fails to stick; its victims will be the relatively unsophisticated 'sense-datum' theories commonly attributed to, amongst others, the classical British empiricists. We will need to take into account developments since the time of Descartes, Locke and Hume.

From this it will be clear that my sympathies lie in principle with those participants in the debate on transcendental arguments who claim that, whatever can be shown concerning the necessary employment of certain concepts, or conceptual schemes, this cannot settle the question of whether those concepts are ever successfully applied; that is, whether the items of which they are the concepts, actually exist. Thus Stroud argues that transcendental arguments of the sort we have been discussing can prove at most "that, for example, we must believe that there are material objects";<sup>12</sup> they cannot show such beliefs to be true, that material objects actually exist. Stroud accepts that such arguments, if valid, refute a radical conventionalism which holds that our employment of a particular conceptual scheme is, in the last instance, a matter of decision; but denies that they defeat the sceptic. For, even if a certain kind of scepticism is intelligible only if the conventional conceptual scheme is already employed, this shows that that scheme is objectively

successfully applied only if we import some form of verification principle (for example, to the effect that, for at least some basic concepts, if we have the concepts we can sometimes know that they are successfully applied). Such verificationism, and the allied Paradigm Case Argument, founder on the fact that, as Rorty puts it, "appearance is as good as reality for giving meaning to terms (or content to concepts)".<sup>13</sup> Something like this argument is accepted by several philosophers in this area;<sup>14</sup> and is further supported by the argument given earlier in this chapter to the effect that there is, pace Strawson, a sense of existence in which we can ask whether the objects, of which our concepts are the concepts, actually exist. Given this, it is with some reluctance that I turn to a development of the argument about conceptual schemes.

#### "A Transcendental Argument to end all Transcendental Arguments"

Rorty, strengthening Stroud's intuition, claims that "no transcendental argument will be able to prove necessary existence (e.g. of material objects)".<sup>15</sup> This leaves intact a kind of 'parasitism' argument, to the effect that a particular proposed alternative to our ordinary conceptual scheme is parasitic on the ordinary one, in that it "would not be intelligible to someone who was not familiar with the old way".<sup>16</sup> This, Rorty argues, must be the point of transcendental arguments defined as those which prove that certain concepts are necessary for experience. "For what would be the point of knowing, for example, that you have to think about material objects if you are going to think about

anything at all, except to defeat the person who suggests a different 'conceptual framework'?"<sup>17</sup> Rorty suggests that this must take the form of an ad hominem response limited to such alternatives as the sceptic may propose. Thus the Kant-Strawson argument succeeds only in showing that the sense-datum conceptual scheme is parasitic on the ordinary material object one. There can be no general ad hominem argument, to show that all alternative conceptual schemes are parasitic on our ordinary one, since we cannot limit in advance the sceptic's imagination.

Now there is a response to this limitation on the scope of transcendental arguments. For, according to Rorty, Davidson has an argument which invalidates a central presupposition of sceptical and anti-sceptical transcendental argumentation. Both scepticism and the Kantian arguments against it, presuppose the distinction between conceptual scheme and content. This distinction, says Davidson, the third and last dogma of empiricism,<sup>18</sup> is ultimately untenable. Both the sceptic and the anti-sceptic thus have the imaginary ground removed from beneath their feet. This, says Rorty, is "a transcendental argument to end all transcendental arguments".<sup>19</sup>

This is an interesting argument, not least because it is a variant of one advanced by Hegel against Kant nearly two hundred years ago. Hegel criticises the presupposition of the separation between subject and object, which he sees in Kant's work, and the distinction between conceptual scheme and content can be taken as one of its guises: the conceptual scheme is contributed by the subject, the content by the object. There will be reason to come back to this point in a later chapter.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the argument aims to silence scepticism by showing that it is, in the last instance, unintelligible: that a necessary condition of its meaningfulness does not obtain. In seeing whether the argument succeeds, I want to look not so much at Davidson's argument in detail, but rather Rorty's transcendental use of it. But there is at least one point about Davidson's own argument that I want to raise. Davidson suggests that people have different conceptual schemes if they speak languages which fail of intertranslatability.<sup>21</sup> But, Davidson argues, we cannot make sense of the notion of a conceptual framework which is "largely true, but not translatable".<sup>22</sup> We can never be in a position to judge that others possess a different conceptual scheme. Further "if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one".<sup>23</sup> The very idea of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible. Now this seems to force too far the link between possessing a conceptual scheme and possessing a language. Surely, we want to say, the Newtonian physicist had a different conceptual scheme from that employed by twentieth-century physicists. They did not possess the concepts that are now employed, or, of course, a grasp of their interconnections. They worked with a different scheme which is now outmoded. Now of course we can understand Newtonian physicists - often they already speak the same language, and do not need to be translated<sup>24</sup> - and if a modern physicist were able to talk with a Newtonian one, she might well be able to give the Newtonian a grasp of the new concepts. Nevertheless, prior to such consultation, they have different schemes. The difference

between Aristotelian physics and both the Newtonian and relativistic physics is even greater. It seems that we have a valid sense in which to speak of alternative schemes for conceptualising our experience or, ignoring the sceptic, the world. What might be argued, of course, is that the intelligibility of one scheme presupposes the employment of that to which it is an alternative: perhaps relativistic physics is parasitic on the Newtonian concepts in this way. Or, further, that the possibility of such alternatives presupposes a central shared core (for example, the concept of a material object), so that these alternative schemes cannot be radically different, but must fall within certain limitations. Understood like this, as arguing that we can make no sense of the notion of radically different conceptual schemes, and that variations must all share certain limiting features, Davidson's argument may find a comfortably sympathetic audience.<sup>25</sup> The apocalyptic tones of his, and Rorty's, utterances will, however, have been muted.

Let us see how successfully the argument can combat the sceptic. It seems clear, in line with what has been said so far, that the sceptic can accept either that there can be no conceptual scheme radically different from the ordinary one, or that the very notion of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible. For the possibility of empiricist scepticism does not rely on the possibility, or even the concept, of radically alternative conceptual frameworks; but merely on the recognition that whatever conceptual scheme is employed, how things are experienced.

as being need not coincide with how they are. There is the possibility of experiential error. Given this possibility, we may ask whether any feature of our ordinary viewpoint, including the belief in a material world, is actually true. The sceptic may produce alternative schemes, so as to suggest that the beliefs formed within our conceptual scheme are open to question, but they are not required. The sceptic need set up no competition, only ask how we know that a certain belief is true, or that how things are experienced as being is how they really are.<sup>26</sup> All the sceptic requires, in fact, is precisely that ordinary, simple notion of truth as objective - and its inseparable comrade, error - which Davidson himself takes as basic. Thus while it is fashionable to see the Kantian-style transcendental enterprise in terms of justifying the employment of a particular conceptual scheme in the face of alternatives, and although Kant's work certainly lends itself to such an interpretation; if the transcendental strategy is aimed rather at the justification of knowledge-claims in face only of the possibility of error, or of the non-veridicality of experience, then Davidson's argument marks at most a dead-end for the fashionable interpretation.

Even so, in a later discussion, Davidson pursues another aspect of his approach to meaning, and the question of how interpretation of the speech of another is possible, aiming to show that scepticism is unintelligible. Though distinct from the argument against the idea of a conceptual scheme, this argument appears in tandem with it, as well as elsewhere. Let us take it on its own merits.



Following Quine, Davidson supposes that we can tell when a speaker holds a sentence to be true without knowing what she means about the sentence, or what beliefs she holds about its unknown subject matter.<sup>27</sup> But given such evidence, an interpretation of the utterances must go hand in hand with an attribution of beliefs to the speaker, since the holding true of a sentence is the outcome of two factors: what the person believes, and (what she takes to be) the meaning of the sentence. But in constructing a theory of belief and meaning from sentences held true, if we cannot assume that the speakers language is our own, the only possibility is to start by assuming general agreement on beliefs.<sup>28</sup> This principle of charity is not merely a methodological option, but a necessary condition of having a viable theory at all.<sup>29</sup> "If", Davidson adds, "we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything".<sup>30</sup> Now this is not to say that we must interpret another's utterances so as to obtain total agreement in beliefs; some false beliefs can be accommodated. It does mean, however, that we can only identify a (perhaps false) belief on the assumption of the truth of a wide range of beliefs, within which the belief in question is located.<sup>31</sup> As Davidson puts it: "the intelligibility of such identifications must depend on a background of largely unmentioned and unquestioned beliefs".<sup>32</sup> Thus, for Davidson, we can rule out a priori the possibility of massive error in our beliefs. We may not know specifically which are true and which false, but most of them must be true.

Davidson then turns this point about the necessary constraints of radical interpretation, against the sceptic. In a later paper he clarifies the point of the earlier discussions. Not only must an interpreter assume agreement of beliefs, but further "objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true belief. Agreement does not make for truth, but much of what is agreed must be true if some of what is agreed is false".<sup>33</sup> Davidson then introduces the idea of an omniscient interpreter, who solves the problem posed by the interdependence of belief and meaning as we do. Therefore, she must find as much agreement as is needed to make sense of attributions of belief and interpretations of utterances; and, being omniscient, what is agreed is by hypothesis true.

Davidson concludes:

But now it is plain why massive error about the world is simply unintelligible, for to suppose it intelligible is to suppose there could be an interpreter (the omniscient one) who correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken, and this we have shown to be impossible.<sup>34</sup>

Does this argument work?

The principle of charity, that we should optimise agreement on beliefs in interpreting the utterances of another, is clearly important. But consider this point: "it would be more charitable to make allowances for the likelihood that (the speaker's) circumstances .... may have led him understandably into error".<sup>35</sup> Lewis continues, "We should even ascribe to him those errors which we think we would have made, or should have made, if our evidence and training had been like his".<sup>36</sup> Now this improved version of the principle of charity, with which Davidson apparently agrees,<sup>37</sup> is crucial in the discussion of the effect of Davidson's argument against

scepticism. To see this, let us grant Davidson's omniscient interpreter a few practical abilities, so that she bears a certain resemblance to Descartes' malignant demon. Suppose this interpreter has arranged things so that it seems to someone that she lives on earth, and interacts with people and objects in the ordinary way, whereas in fact there exists only this one person, who is wired up to a piece of gadgetry in a little box somewhere in space. The interpreter has things arranged so that she knows how things seem to the motionless person in the box (by means of visual display units, and so on), but also of course, so that she knows how things really are, which is very different. Further, it is arranged that the deluded victim actually utters the sentences that she thinks she does. How is the omniscient one to interpret these? Given her omniscience, so that she knows what the victim has for evidence, she can make certain assumptions about the victim's beliefs. It will be reasonable to assume that the victim has largely the beliefs which the interpreter would have in the same position. Thus the interpreter will attribute to the victim a whole network of beliefs, in the light of the evidence available to the victim, in the context of which particular beliefs can be identified and criticised, and so on. But of course, things are such that these beliefs will be largely false. The interpreter will therefore interpret the victim's utterances in such a way as to mesh in with an attribution of beliefs, most of which are false, but which are eminently reasonable in the light of the evidence available to the speaker. She has "correctly interpreted someone else as being massively mistaken". If this tedious scenario is, as it seems to be, consistent, then we must further

admit the possibility that when we interpret the utterances of others (or at least when it seems that this occurs), we assume a corpus of shared beliefs which may nevertheless be massively in error. Davidson's argument, while it shows that, in ordinary circumstances, interpreters will assume agreement in beliefs with those whose utterances they interpret, cannot fulfil the grander purposes set for it. It cannot assure us of the truth of most of our beliefs: it cannot refute the empiricist sceptic.

#### Concluding Remarks

None of the arguments discussed above reaches the heart of that sophisticated radical empiricism which has developed since the doctrines of the classical British Empiricists. In the light of this, some philosophers have concluded that no transcendental argument can finally settle accounts with scepticism.<sup>38</sup> However, none of the above arguments address the central presupposition of radical empiricism, namely of the possibility of the concept of experience. In the following chapters I shall claim that there is a kind of transcendental argument which genuinely defeats scepticism precisely by investigating the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, and hence of the possibility of radical empiricism itself.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Concept of Experience

In the last chapter, the general picture that I hoped would emerge is this: if arguments against radical empiricism and its inherent sceptical possibilities leave the availability of the concept of experience unquestioned, then they cannot legitimately get beyond the radical empiricist position that it is possible that experience is all there is. We should therefore not take this concept for granted, but look for the necessary conditions of its possibility. If the statement of these conditions conflicts with the radical empiricist thesis, then that thesis must be false. More will be said of this strategy in the next chapter, but a brief formulation of it in Kantian style would be this: instead of asking for the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience, we ask for those of the possibility of the concept of experience, and hence of radical empiricism itself. Clearly, though, if we are to examine the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience - the central concept of radical empiricism - then we need to know more precisely what the concept of experience is. This is a confusing and contentious issue, and has been throughout the past few centuries of philosophy. I feel that it needs to be discussed above all in relation to the philosophical purposes which the concept is expected to serve. With this in mind, and to provide some of the context within which further discussion can take place, I want to look at a particular feature of recent British philosophy.

## The Kantian and the Sense-datum Theorist

Over the last twenty or thirty years sophisticated sense-datum theorists like A.J. Ayer, and Kantian challengers such as P.F. Strawson, appear often to talk right past each other. The intransigence of each protagonist strikes his opponent as an almost wilful refusal to see points which are there to be seen. In discussing a recent exchange between them,<sup>1</sup> I want to see why this is so, and to relate it to the question of the different philosophical purposes connected with the different concepts of experience which they take as primary.

I begin with an outline of a particular sense-datum theory, as a target for Kantian attack. (There have been many different theories which could legitimately be termed 'sense-datum theories'. This one is intended to be as close as reasonably possible to the letter, and more importantly to the purpose, of Professor Ayer's.) Our perceptual judgements embody or reflect a general view of the world, as containing objects, variously propertied, located in a common space and continuing in their existence independently of our interrupted and relatively fleeting perceptions of them.<sup>2</sup> However, alive to the possibility of error in such judgements, and in the light of possible rival views of how things are - for example that a malign demon makes it seem, merely, as if there were such a world - responsible philosophers must work back from these views to a common ground which the rival views can agree on. Thus both the ordinary realist view of the world, and the views which oppose it, can agree that it at least seems that the material world exists; experience, in Husserlian terms, is at

least intentionally of such a world. Sentences which report how things seem can then, if desired, be transformed into sentences about seeming-objects, or sense-data, as long as we say nothing about sense-data that cannot be translated back into the terminology of seeming.<sup>3</sup> Given the agreement on how things seem, or are experienced as being, there is no need to restrict ourselves to the traditional sense-datum concepts like coloured patches and tickling sensations: sense-data can cover, for example, 'visual leaf-patterns', where such terms are understood as 'applying to any members of the range of patterns which would typically lead the observer to think that he was seeing the corresponding visual object.'<sup>4</sup> This agreement also helps us to avoid other problems traditionally associated with the empiricist's use of the concept of experience. For the agreement on data is not gained by a supposed immediate reflection (on 'this, here, now'), but by working back to a position which is acceptable to rival theories. (Thus while Priestley spoke of mercury losing phlogiston, and Lavoisier of the formation of mercuric oxide, they could agree that mercury turned red when heated.) The data do not have to be absolutely, incorrigibly and infallibly given as the result of a process of immediate reflection, but only given relative to the competing theories; so the problems of such foundational immediacy are avoided. (We should note that without the existence of such relative data, the theories could not be understood as competing.)

The description of experience can then be taken as providing data, relative to the possible views of how things really are; and since

that description does not entail that the material world (or the malign demon) actually exists, the claim that it does exist must be seen as a theory, relative to those data. In this logical sense<sup>5</sup>, we can speak of the ordinary realist view of the world as an interpretation of these data, or as a theory based on the evidence presented by experience. In this situation, the philosophically responsible thing to do might seem to be to claim that perhaps all there is, is experience, and to keep a sceptical distance from claims about the actual existence of the material world and its objects. How does Strawson reply to all this?

One reply we could expect concerns the generality of this retreat to a (relatively) neutral sense-datum description. Consider, for example, a particular experience describable as "seeming to see a pink elephant". Let us propose two theories to account for this experience. One claims that there exists a pink elephant which is indeed being seen; the other that there are no such elephants, only the experience of seeming to see them (induced, we could suggest, by abnormal electro-chemical activity in the brain). Now, Strawson could argue, while the retreat to a sense-datum description, as neutral relative to the rival theories (providing data each can accept), is available with regard to a single experience, it cannot be coherently undertaken across the board. That is, he would argue that such backtracking to the sense-datum description is possible only within the framework of a general belief in an objective, independent world. The view that perhaps experience is all that exists - associated with a general retreat to sense-datum descriptions - is not coherent.



This is effectively the argument criticised in the previous chapter. It is in any case not that which Strawson presents here (though it is not clear to what extent he distinguishes the two for himself). In the present exchange, Strawson produces an argument which brings to light a difference in opinion concerning the concept of experience and its function.

Strawson argues that in giving a strictly veridical account of our experience we must use concepts of realistically conceived objects; <sup>6</sup> indeed, as Ayer agrees, the description will be arrived at through an attenuation of our perceptual judgements. <sup>7</sup> But these concepts are indispensable, Strawson continues, only because, prior to philosophical reflection and awareness of scepticism, we take the general view of the world articulated through concepts of the objective as true. This in turn has the consequence that it is inappropriate to represent the realist view of the world as a theory based on experiential evidence, as an interpretation of the data, since the strict description of the data must be in terms which "presuppose the acceptance of the theory on the part of those for whom the data are data". <sup>8</sup> Sensible experience (in general) presents itself as an immediate consciousness of the existence of things outside us: the realist view of the world is not a theoretical commitment, but something "given with the given". <sup>9</sup>

What should be the response here? It must be based on a closer understanding of the purposes pursued by the sense-datum theorist and the Kantian. Ayer, engaged in the project of the justification of knowledge-claims, is aiming at laying out the

logical relations between possible views of how things are, and the veridical description of experience in which judgement as to the actual existence of 'things outside us' is suspended. The notions of data, evidence, inference, interpretation and theory must be understood in this context, that of an analysis of the extent to which the judgements embodied in our sense-experience go beyond what is logically entailed by a strict description of that experience; and not as elements of some actually occurring processes. As Ayer frequently insists,<sup>10</sup> this excuses us from the implication that any conscious process of inference, carrying us from the received data of experience to the construction of a theory, actually occurs. The temptation is rather to say that the process is implicit, but there is danger here. Such a process presupposes at least an implicit awareness of the data. It is a mistake, however, to think that calling an awareness implicit thereby precludes it from questions as to its conceptual structure: it merely transfers the question from the explicit to the implicit level of awareness. We can clearly distinguish between the awareness of, say, a five-year-old who handles and talks of chairs and tables, and that of a new born baby. The five-year-old, though not cognisant of the term "material object", may be held, in virtue of her or his behaviour, to have an implicit awareness of chairs etc. as things which persist in space and time, which can be touched, seen and so on - in short an awareness of them as material objects - which the baby lacks. Even two-year-olds, without the use of the term 'chair', may manifest an implicit awareness of an object as a chair (and, a fortiori, as a material object), by using it to sit on, dragging it to the table at tea-time, and so on. Again, there is here an

implicit awareness with a different structure from that of the baby. Now it seems to me reasonable to carry over the link between the notions of awareness of something as X, and of the use of the concept of X, from the explicit to the implicit level. We could then talk of the implicit use of concepts in cases of implicit awareness of something as such-and-such. It may be argued that the link between the notions of the use of a concept and of linguistic competence have a stronger tie, though some parallel account of the structural differences between implicit awarenesses would be required, and this issue will be taken up in Chapter 5. In any event, the point of Strawson's objection remains: if there is to be an implicit awareness of, for example, visual leaf patterns, as visual leaf patterns, such an awareness (the implicit use of such concepts) presupposes acceptance of the ordinary realist view of the world, so that such an awareness cannot provide us with data upon which that view is a theoretical construction. Further, Strawson argues, if this awareness is of, for example, coloured visual patches as coloured visual patches, even the implicit use of such traditional sense-datum concepts presupposes at least the implicit use of concepts of the objective, and hence the acceptance of the realist view of the world; again such an awareness cannot provide us with data upon which that view is a theoretical construction. It seems, then, following Strawson's argument, that the implicit awareness with which the implicit inferential process is to begin must not employ concepts at all; it must be an awareness of something without being an awareness of it as such and such. That is, the sense-datum theorist seems to be left with the notion

of an awareness of pure sensory material, prior to the reception of any conceptual form, as the first step in the process which leads to the implicit adoption of the ordinary realist view of the world. Now this suggestion of an absolute separation of sense material and conceptual form, with awareness of the former preceding conferral of the latter, is hardly acceptable; for one thing, it presents us with a mysterious form of awareness to which we can never return, since even the artist's awareness of items in the visual field is of them as a round red patch (and so on), and so which hardly squares with the epistemological purposes for which sense-data were first introduced. To then attempt to describe this bare material only compounds confusion, since any description would necessarily presuppose that the material had been brought under concepts. There is no way we can reach these bare data, we can deal with the experiential material only as already conceptualised. In the light of these considerations it would seem sensible to scrap the whole notion of an implicit inferential process from sense-data to the realist view of the world. Instead, we can find an analytical place for talk about sense-data. For the sense-datum theorist can claim that for the use in perceptual experience of concepts of ordinary physical objects to be possible, there must at least be some sensitivity to, for example, differences in colour, shape, relative spatial position and so on. This is not to imply that there actually occurs an awareness of such items, as coloured patches, or as visual leaf patterns, prior to the adoption of the realist view of the world articulated through concepts of the objective. Nor does it imply

a bare awareness of the sensory content, employing no concepts, prior to that adoption. It merely makes and develops the analytical point with which Kant begins the Critique of Pure Reason, that there could be no experience without both intuitions and concepts. The analytical separation presupposes the unity of experience as that within which the components are separated; there is no implication that the components could be torn free of that context so that one could precede the other in a temporal process.<sup>11.</sup>

It should be clear now that the contention, that our claims about the existence of a real material world and things within it go beyond what is entailed by a strictly veridical description of experience, is separable from the notion that some kind of inferential process actually, if mysteriously, occurs. The sense-datum theorist can then accommodate Strawson's following summary:

Whereas Ayer says we take a step beyond our sensible experience in making our perceptual judgements, I say rather that we take a step back (in general) from our perceptual judgements in framing accounts of our sensible experience.<sup>12.</sup>

For it can be agreed that a description of the experience arrived at through attenuating our ordinary perceptual judgements presupposes the non-inferential use of concepts of the objective, and the pretheoretical acceptance of the realist view of the world as true. This is the step back. But, the sense-datum theorist maintains, in the light of the possibility of error, and of alternative claims as to how things really are, we can see that a logical step forward is required to get from the strict description of experience to the realist view. This view has the logical status of a theory relative to experience.

We can now see that Strawson's concern to show that concepts of the objective must necessarily be employed in experience, providing a framework within which alone concepts of sense-data can be used, does not in itself conflict with Ayer's concern with the justification of knowledge-claims normally articulated in terms of concepts of the objective. For the question of the conceptual (or intentional) structure of experience, even of its necessary conceptual structure, is a side issue for Ayer here. In saying that experience is ultimately of sense-data, he is making a claim about evidential primacy (in the sense explained above), rather than about the concepts in which experience is, or must be, articulated: the 'of' is not intentional. The sophisticated sense-datum theorist can accept the Kantian view that experience must be articulated through concepts of the objective, and that only within such a framework can sense-data concepts (the traditional or the 'visual leaf-pattern' kind) be employed, since the primacy here accorded to concepts of the object is presuppositional: the use in experience of sense-data concepts necessarily presupposes the use in experience of concepts of the objective. None of these affects the point that the claims implicit in such experience go beyond the available evidence.

Strawson and Ayer are to this extent at cross-purposes. There are, however, features that confuse the issue, the most important being Ayer's persistence in talking of the construction of our ordinary realist view of the world on the basis of sense-data (or 'percepts', as he prefers to call them). The story he tells here,<sup>13</sup>

reminiscent of Hume, is full of talk of an observer of sense-data, remembering and comparing them and so coming to think certain things; developing certain concepts; making correlations and adopting certain measures. Ayer then takes all this back: it is merely a fiction to show the general features of our experience that make it possible for us to successfully employ the realist 'theory'.<sup>14</sup> This of course is what he must say, if he is to avoid Strawson's objection, but it makes the use of the story misleading at the very least. In fact, there seems to be a tension in Ayer's thought between the analytical account of features necessary to our having the experience we have, and which embodies our ordinary realist view of the world, and the need felt for some kind of quasi-psychological account of how, on our limited data, we arrive at such a rich and complex view. This tension closely parallels that between Kant's analytical use of the concept of synthesis, and his use of the term to name an actual mysterious operation on the part of the transcendental ego. As Strawson argues with respect to Kant, it is the latter use which must be jettisoned in order to make way for 'a truly empiricist philosophy'.<sup>15</sup> Once this is done, it may seem that the main reason for calling Ayer a sense-datum theorist, the role in which he receives most challenges, evaporates. Nevertheless, what remains is the primary radical empiricist concern with the justification of knowledge-claims, and the attendant possibility of scepticism.

This introduces a second confusing feature, already mentioned, which is the fact that it is unclear to what extent Strawson runs

together his argument about the necessary conceptual structuring of experience, which is at work in this exchange with Ayer, and his argument about the incoherence of radical empiricist scepticism. I hope to have separated these out, and to have shown that we can accept the former whilst rejecting the latter.

In the light of this discussion, we can see that the differences between Strawson and Ayer arise in part from confusion as to the concept of experience being used by their respective opponent, and as to the function assigned by their respective opponent to that concept. But how can we get anywhere with examining the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, without being clear about the concept itself? And how can we do this, when the adoption of a particular concept of experience is itself a matter of argument? To find our way here, and to see the importance of the philosophical purposes which underlie the adoption of a particular concept of experience, let us look closer at Strawson's concept of experience and the purposes he has for it.

### The concept of experience, and its philosophical purpose

Strawson sets out the following thesis assumed as a premise in (his reconstruction of) the Transcendental Deduction:

that there must be such unity among the members of some temporally extended series of experiences as is required for the possibility of self-consciousness, or self-ascription of experiences, on the part of a subject of such experiences (the thesis of the necessary unity of consciousness).<sup>16</sup>

This thesis is linked with the dual character of experience (viz. "that particular contents of experience should be recognised as having some general character") and, as so linked, is taken as a "standard-setting definition of what is to count as 'experience'".<sup>17</sup>



He also takes care not to presuppose anything about the nature of the particular items recognised as having a general character. His favoured term is "accusatives", indicating that they are internal to experience, and not necessarily (at this stage) conceived of as independent of experience. Strawson then tries to show that, beginning with this concept, the 'contents' or 'accusatives' of experience must be brought, at least in part, under concepts of the objective. But why should we begin with this concept, with this definition of "experience"? Strawson notes that other forms of sentience, short of this standard, may exist, but goes on to argue not only that no other philosopher "even the most economical of empiricists" has tried to work with a more limited conception,<sup>18</sup> but that only this concept of experience 'can be of interest to us'.<sup>19</sup> It is not clear to me that writers such as Hume, Russell and Ayer do in fact build the possibility of self-consciousness into their concept of experience; but I wish to discuss the question of the interest which binds together the community indicated by Strawson's first-person plural.

Some simplified philosophical history may be useful here. Strawson wants to presuppose nothing about the character of the items of which experience is experience, so as to argue for the primary and necessary application in experience of a certain conceptual framework. But why this interest in conceptual frameworks? Insofar as it reflects Kant's own concerns, it is a response to Hume's classical empiricism, and the accompanying "scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us must be accepted merely on faith".<sup>20</sup>

But Hume effectively runs together the question of the justification of our ordinary belief in an independent world with the question of the conceptual structure of experience. Instead of sticking to the point we have seen made by Ayer, that such a belief affirms more than can logically be entailed by any strict account of experience,<sup>21</sup> he continues this with a theory of how, with the aid of the principles of the imagination, we progress from awareness of simple sensory qualities to the realist picture we all end up with. It may then seem that, if it can be shown that sense-data concepts presuppose the application in experience of concepts of the objective, the recurrent ghost of scepticism can be laid. This we have seen, in Chapter One, not to be the case, but it helps us understand one component of Strawson's concept of experience. For a fuller understanding of the philosophical motives underlying the choice of that concept we must examine some of the presuppositions shared alike by the Kantian and the sense-datum theorist, by Strawson and Ayer.

They, with others in the mainstream of post-Cartesian philosophy, share a concern with the justification of claims to knowledge and the possibility of scepticism regarding such claims; and here lies the importance for philosophy of the concept of experience. Its fundamental significance lies in its opening a gap, between how things are experienced as being and how they are, which is the ground of the possibility of any critical philosophy. In the light of the possible disparity between how things are and how they are experienced as being, the question of the justification of claims to knowledge emerges. Without the recognition of this possible disparity, this epistemological gap, the interrogation of knowledge-claims which is central to all philosophy (other than the 'angels

on pins' type) would not be possible. It underlies the Cartesian Doubt and those traditions in Western Philosophy which followed in its wake. It also helps us understand other features of Strawson's concept, since for someone to possess the concept of experience required here, and to recognise the epistemological gap, the self-ascription of experience is required; as when we comment on an experience of ours as being non-veridical: for example, it seemed to me as though X, but in fact it was the case that Y. (I do not mean to rule out here the possibility that we could do without the self, and cling only to that self-reflexiveness of experience which for Strawson constitutes the core of empirical self-consciousness;<sup>22</sup> but only to throw some light on the reasons for his choice of concept.)

Thus can we understand the philosophical interest of a concept of experience into which the possibility of self-ascription is built, rather than a less sophisticated form of sentience, say of dogs or babies, which does not involve such self-ascription. And if experience is to provide a kind of alternative to successful cognition of an objective world, on the basis of which we can call for the justification of knowledge-claims, then it must have the dual character Strawson talks of, at least insofar as it must comprise some kind of awareness or consciousness of some kind of item, which recognises that item as falling under a general concept.

We now have a fuller grasp of the purposes in whose light Strawson's concept of experience is of interest to us. What I wish to show now, is that if we develop this reflection on the

conditions of the possibility of a concern with the justification of knowledge-claims, it enables us to pre-empt the Strawsonian project. For look again at the 'accusatives' of experience. We have seen that Strawson needs to avoid presupposing from the start that these items must be conceived of, in experience, as independent of experience; were he to make such a presupposition, he would hardly require an argument to the effect that concepts of the objective must be employed in experience. But it is precisely this presupposition which must be made if the concept of experience is to be adequate to the philosophical purposes it is to serve. For unless experience is of items conceived of as independent of experience itself, there would be no possibility of opening up a gap between how things are and how they are experienced as being, and so no possibility of critical empiricist philosophical thought. If experience involved nothing more than an awareness of an item which made no claim to be independent of experience, for example, the red patches and tickling sensations of the sense-datum theorists,<sup>23</sup> then there could be no disparity between how things are experienced as being and how they are, since there would be nothing more to how things are than how they are experienced as being. It must be already built into that concept of experience which is to be of fundamental interest to us, that experience is, at least in part, of items conceived of as existing independently of experience itself; that those items are, in other words, brought under "concepts of the objective". Without this as the primary concept of experience, Kant could never have faced a scandal, nor Strawson his sceptic. Strawson's reconstruction of the Transcendental Deduction can succeed only in reaching the point which it first started from.

Although this account retains the value of some of Kant's Analytic, particularly the Analogies which lay out the necessary structure of the conception of an objective world in terms of substance and causality, and although the kind of considerations prompted by Kant's argument have a value which transcends this argument itself, it nevertheless takes a major thread of the Deduction - the argument in Strawson's words, that experience must be brought under concepts of the objective - to be, at bottom, idle. It is pre-empted by a reflection on the features required for the concept of experience to play its allotted role. It might seem that this aspect of my account calls for more discussion; for how could Kant, and then Strawson, have failed to recognise this point? The answer lies in a forgetfulness of the provenance of their concept of experience inscribed in their work. We have already seen something of the underlying tendency to confuse the question of the logical relations between a strict account of experience and the claims to knowledge implicit in that experience, with the issue of a quasi-psychological genetic account of how we arrive at this everyday realist picture; a tendency which led the classical empiricists into their talk of simple sense-qualities, and Kant (and Strawson) to take up their stance in opposition. It is not then difficult to focus, in a spirit of scientific neutrality, on a generalised concept of experience as an awareness of an item, where nothing is presupposed about the nature of that item. Unfortunately, all this occurs at the cost of a gradual amnesia concerning the circumstances in which it emerged, and the features

needed for the primary concept to serve its philosophical purpose. Now there is certainly some intrinsic interest in showing that if one starts with this concept, then the contents of experience must be brought, at least in part, under concepts of the objective. It nevertheless remains the case that this requirement must be built into any concept of experience which, as the ground of the possibility of the demand for justification, can be of fundamental significance to critical philosophy, and so explain the philosophical interest which Strawson speaks vaguely of. That the Transcendental Deduction can be held to have secured very great and novel gains in philosophy,<sup>24</sup> is thus a mark of the thoroughness with which critical philosophy forgets its beginnings, and so of the need for the kind of philosophical self-reflection we are attempting here.

We have established that the conclusion of Strawson's argument - that experience must be brought in part under concepts of the objective - in fact states part of what is required for the concept of experience to be of critical empirical use at all. But a brief consideration shows that we need to go further; more is needed for the concept of experience to play its allotted role. In order to make possible the emergence of the question of the legitimation of claims to knowledge in the light of the possible disparity between how things are and how they are experienced as being, we need more than the concept of experience as an awareness of things conceived of as existing independently of the experience of them. For, as it stands, far from providing us with a critical alternative to the ordinary realist view of things, this concept enshrines that view.

It gives us a general notion of awareness, where the question of the veridicality of that awareness is unquestioned. It is, we can say, the naive, rather than the critical concept of experience; closer to the concept used when we say that we have experienced, say, a thunder-storm, where this carries with it the unquestioned assumption that the storm, of course, exists. But the point of critical empiricist questioning is precisely that this assumption can be false, and should therefore be placed in abeyance. If a claim to knowledge is to be questioned on the grounds that how things are experienced as being may be at variance with how they are, then the naive concept of experience, with the built-in unquestioned assumption that how things are experienced as being is in accord with how they are, is useless. The concept of experience required for such a role must be one which does not bring this assumption with it, but leaves open the possibility of epistemological disparity. Indeed, it was the necessity of leaving open this possibility which called for the employment within experience of concepts of the objective.<sup>25</sup> Only this critical concept of experience can allow the empiricist to make sense of the idea that although it seemed that there was a thunderstorm - this was how things were experienced - there may, in fact, not have been one at all. In short, this critical concept of experience is required for the empiricists critical philosophical purposes.

We now have a clear grasp of the concept of experience in question. This grasp has been achieved not by individual fiat, or analysis of ordinary language, or tacit convention, but by analysing what the concept must be in order to serve the critical

philosophical purposes required of it. Without this concept, those purposes cannot be fulfilled. We now have enough of the concept to attempt, by means of an investigation of the necessary conditions of its possibility, a genuine refutation of radical empiricism and the scepticism associated with it. This is the task of Chapter Three.

#### Appendix: Experience and Thought

A terminological point leads on to an issue which will be important later on. It will be useful to be able to speak of experience as 'intentionally' of, say, material objects; where the 'intentional' helps to indicate the possibility that how things are experienced as being may differ from how they are. It is important to clarify this use of the term in relation especially to Husserl's. For Husserl, we can specify the intentional object of an experience - for example, a table - without specifying what he calls the 'positional' character of the experience. Thus the same table can be the intentional object of a perceptual experience, in which it is perhaps posited as actually existing; a memory experience, in which it is perhaps posited as having existed; a desire, in which it is perhaps not posited as existing at all, and so on.<sup>26</sup>

Now if we have an experience which consists of imagining seeing a table, of a particular shape, design and so on, then although the intentional object of the experience is an example of a medium-sized material object - one which, if it exists,



exists independently of the experience of it - that object is not posited as actually existing. Given this, the question of a disparity between how things are experienced as being and how things are, does not arise: things are not experienced as being such and such a way, here.

If we are to be interested in the notion of how things are experienced as being, then that notion will have to carry with it the assumption that things are posited in experience in such a way that there can be a divergence between how things are experienced as being, and how they are. Thus, when I say "the experience is intentionally of a table", I shall normally be conflating two aspects of the experience: the fact that the intentional object of the experience is a table, and the fact that the positional character of the experience is such as to render it capable of conflicting with how things are.

This brings out the fact that what is really at the core of the critical concept of experience is that it at least implicitly carries with it a certain claim, thought or belief about how things are. It is this which can conflict with how things, in fact, are, and so provide the basis for the critical questioning of knowledge-claims. The question as to whether critical philosophical questioning can do without the concept of experience, and keep instead to the concept of a (possibly false) thought - that which has to be at least implicit in experience - will be discussed in Chapter 4. It is to the question of the coherence of a radical empiricist critical philosophy that we now turn.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Refutation of Empiricism

#### Introduction

If the argument of the preceding chapter is successful, then we have some grasp of the concept of experience which the empiricist must use in order to make possible the concern with the justification of knowledge-claims. Briefly, it is the concept of experience as, intentionally, of items in an objective world, such that how things are experienced as being may be at variance with how things really are.<sup>1</sup> On this basis, I want to present two attempts at a refutation of radical empiricism; the first involving conceptual entailment, the second involving presupposition. An objection to the first attempt will lead us to the second. The second attempt is intended to succeed.

#### The First Attempt

The outline of the concept of experience given in the previous chapter seems to open the way immediately to a conclusive refutation of radical empiricism, by making use of a conceptual entailment which now seems to be associated with the critical concept of experience. If the concept of experience carries a central reference to an objective reality, then, if there is experience, then there must be an objective reality - objective precisely in that how things are with it may differ from how they are experienced as being. So, given our grasp of the concept of experience, if there is experience - which the empiricist can hardly deny - then there is an objective reality. The truth of the empiricist claim that there

is experience, requires the truth of the claim that there is an objective reality. Empiricist scepticism about the existence of such a reality (though not necessarily scepticism concerning the existence of particular items within that reality), is therefore inconsistent: it is true only if it is false.

This way with empiricist scepticism is all too quick, it may be felt. Certainly it relies on what might be called the analysis of the concept of experience; but if so it would seem merely to show that conceptual analysis is not sufficient in this area. Before considering objections to the argument in more detail, I need to make a brief excursus.

#### Excursus: Transposition of the Discussion

For convenience, I want here to make available a transposition of the discussion into terms of the word "experience", rather than the concept of experience. Instead of just talking of what concept of experience is required for critical empiricism, I want to be able to talk also of what meaning the word "experience" must have in order to play its allotted role in critical empiricism. This transposition is not essential to the argument against radical empiricism, but will, I hope, make some of the going easier. This transposition will enable us to steer a course through some awkward language regarding concepts - for example, the notion of the 'content' of a concept, and the problems with this metaphor - by relating it to the less awkward language of semantics which runs parallel to it - for example, talk of the meaning of a word, which I intend to parallel exactly talk of the content of a concept.<sup>2</sup>

This is done by taking the word as the expression of the salient concept, and without begging any questions about the existence of embodied speaking subjects making perceptible marks or noises towards an embodied hearing subject in the ordinary world. We shall, for the present, take the real physical existence of an expression as inessential to the expression as such, thus allowing even for the possibility of private 'marks of concepts' (as past philosophers, including Kant, seem to have done). The brief argument against radical empiricism given above will now be available in the form of the claim that if the term 'experience' is to play its role in critical philosophy - that is, if it is to serve as an expression for the requisite concept - then its meaning must be such as to give rise to certain semantic entailments. In particular, if "There is experience" is true, it must, by virtue of the meaning of "experience", be true that there is a reality with which experience may be at variance. For unless the meaning of "experience" has this consequence, there is no possibility of making the distinction between how things are experienced as being, and how they really are; and it is this distinction which makes possible the question of the legitimation of claims to knowledge which underlies all critical empiricist philosophy.<sup>3</sup> If there is experience, there must be a reality independent of it.

In making this transposition available, I do not commit myself to any view concerning the priority of the concept of a concept, and the concept of language; I just want to use the parallels. In the following discussion, I shall talk of either

the concept of experience, or the term "experience", according to which seems most helpful. Wherever a significant problem is raised by this tactic, I shall draw attention to it. Let us return to the argument against empiricist scepticism, and a first objection to it.

### First Objection and Reply

Here are grouped a number of attempts to avoid, or neutralise, the reference to an objective reality, and so to avoid the commitment it apparently lands us with. After all, having got our concept of experience, expressed by the term "experience", are we not to use it in an empiricist account of this supposed reality? Can we not, with an ear to the history of empiricism, give an account of reality as a theoretical construct, to help enable us explain why experience has the character it does? Or perhaps as merely the general intentional correlate of experience? Or even as a logical construct out of experience? <sup>4.</sup> Notwithstanding the sophistication of their development in empiricist philosophy, none of these accounts can succeed. This is for the simple reason that, in accepting that there is experience, these attempts at recasting objective reality in terms of experience are forced to accept the commitment to an objective reality which comes with it. The conceptual, and corresponding semantic, entailment here cannot be severed by any means which assume that there is, in the required sense, experience.

## Responses to the Reply to the First Objection

1. A number of responses (with variations) to this reply are current. Let us look first at one which stems from Quine's argument against the notions of meaning, synonymy and others in the circle; and the associated attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction.<sup>5</sup> The response is that this notion of semantic (or conceptual) entailment is as shaky as the rest. There are no entailments of the kind needed here, only more or less entrenched ascriptions of truth-values to sentences. It is open to the empiricist, the response continues, to accept that there is experience and reject the purported entailment concerning the existence of an objective reality.

I believe that there are sound general arguments against the Quinean position,<sup>6</sup> but here I will restrict the discussion to a particular point. This concerns the price the empiricist pays for holding that there is experience, whilst rejecting that there is an objective reality. For if there is no objective reality with which experience can be at odds, then there is no possibility of opening up the epistemological gap between experience and reality which makes critical empiricism possible. The price the empiricist must pay for rejecting the entailment, is the entire critical empiricist project, including the scepticism that accompanies it. This, it seems reasonable to say, is not a price the empiricist will find worth paying. Instead, we may be directed to a second response.

2. This consists in an insistence that we can do radical empiricist philosophy with a concept of experience which does not bring with it the commitment to the existence of an objective reality. That is, it is possible to get a concept of experience poorer in entailments, but sufficient for the task required. We might try, for example, a concept of experience as awareness of an item, where nothing is presupposed about either the nature of the item, or the possibility that how it appears may differ from how it in fact is. This would be, in effect, the naive concept of experience discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>7</sup> In the face of such insistence we can only take steps we have already taken. If experience involved nothing more than an awareness of an item which made no claim to be independent of experience, then there could be no disparity between how things are experienced as being, and how they are; there could not, then, be any critical philosophical thought provoked by reflection on such disparity. Such thought is possible only if we move from the naive concept of experience to the critical concept, that is, only if we take into account the possibility that how things are experienced can be different from how they are. To cast it in Carnap's 'material mode': experience must contain the possibility of differing from reality. If it did not, then no empiricist critical philosophy would be possible.
3. In the normal run of things, I would leave that discussion as it stands, but the response therein dismissed might seem to receive stiffer backing from arguments in the recent philosophy

of language associated most closely with Kripke.<sup>8</sup>

For could we not understand the term "experience" as having the kind of 'rigidity' ascribed to general terms? Thus with the term "water" we draw attention to this stuff, whatever its necessary properties might turn out to be, and can then go on to discover that a necessary property possessed by water is a particular molecular structure. Could we not similarly use the term "experience" to draw attention to naive experience, and then go on to discover that a necessary property of experience was that it could differ from objective reality? Even if we accept the underlying theory of general terms - and this conflicts with more traditional theories<sup>9</sup> - the situations are significantly different. The necessary properties ascribed to water are empirically discoverable: these are the properties which water - this stuff - turns out to have. In the meantime we can go on using the term "water" in ways perfectly suited to our purposes. But the necessary property of experience - that it can differ from reality - is not empirically discoverable. It is necessary in that without it the term "experience" cannot be used to suit our purposes. With the naive concept, the epistemological relationship between experience and reality is unquestioned. The raising of the question of this relationship, which is the cornerstone of critical empiricism, requires precisely a concept of experience which takes on board the possibility of epistemological disparity. By virtue of this alone, it can no longer be the naive concept, but the critical concept which must be employed. I prefer to hold



that this shows that this 'necessary property' of experience is an a-priori conceptually necessary property, bringing with it the crucial conceptual entailments. Even so, for those who prefer to see it as merely a necessary presupposition of the critical empiricist use of the concept, that how things are experienced as being may differ from how they are, I shall show in a discussion of Ayer's response that this makes no significant difference to the central argument.

4. Ayer's favoured method of introducing the sense-data, or percepts, which are the elements of his theories of perception and the construction of the objective world, is based on the possibility that how things seem, or are experienced as being, may differ from how they are. Here he talks of the familiar possibility that although it seems that there is a cigarette-case on the table, there may not in fact be one. It may be, say, an hallucination.<sup>10</sup> Having the concept of experience, we can talk of sense-data as items within the 'field' of that experience, but the concept of experience is clearly a necessary pre-requisite.<sup>11</sup> Now Ayer is careful not to offer a definition of "sense-datum" or "percept", using terms from our ordinary language, with their commitment to the existence of an objective reality; for this would immediately entail that, if there are percepts, then there is an objective reality. The talk about cigarette-cases and so on is designed merely to explain, not define, the unfamiliar terms:<sup>12</sup> here we can use any means at our disposal, as long as no logical entailment is built in.<sup>13</sup> Thus although we use

language which presupposes that the objective world of our ordinary perceptual judgements exists, in order to explain the meaning of "percept" (and this will be true of "experience" also), we are told that this does not involve us in any unpleasant logical entailments, and that any apparent implications concerning the existence of an objective world can be severed. Now as far concerns the concept of experience, we have argued that there is a conceptual ('logical') entailment here. But even if we accepted the position described in the previous paragraph, where it is decreed that the commitment to the existence of the objective world is not a matter of conceptual entailment, we cannot escape that commitment. For we have seen that, for the concept of experience to be of use to critical philosophical enquiry, it must necessarily be presupposed that experience may diverge from objective reality. It is thus a necessary presupposition of all empiricist employment of the concept that, where there is experience, there is an objective reality from which it may differ. We cannot then retract this presupposition - for example, by arguing that this reality is only some sort of theoretical, or fictional, or logical construction out of experience - without depriving ourselves of the concept. For if asked to explain this latter employment of the concept, we can, again, only do so on the necessary presupposition of the existence of an objective reality from which experience may diverge. Without this presupposition, the employment of the concept for empiricist purposes is not possible, and so neither is the retraction of the commitment to an objective reality on empiricist grounds.

Ayer himself is concerned explicitly more with the concept of a percept, or sense-datum, (although he makes it clear that the essential notion is that of how things seem, or are experienced as being, as capable of differing from how they are).<sup>14</sup> Here the question of a conceptual entailment to the existence of an objective reality is at least removed a step. But the basic position is unchanged. Even if we accept the absence of an important conceptual entailment here - and it should be clear from the preceding discussion that there are good reasons for not accepting this - we again return to the argument concerning the presuppositions of the use of the concept. If we can use the concept of a percept only on the presupposition that it is part of an experience which may differ from objective reality, then we cannot construe that reality as merely some kind of theoretical construct out of percepts, and so as perhaps not really existing at all. For this would again be to deprive ourselves of the use of the concept required for this construal. Without that necessary presupposition no critical empiricist use of the concept is possible; and so no empiricist retraction of the commitment to the existence of an objective reality, using that concept, is possible. We cannot take away a necessary condition of the use of a concept, or the meaningfulness of the appropriate term, and still use that concept or term. Whether as an entailment of the concept or as a necessary presupposition of its employment, we must accept that, if there is experience, then there is an objective reality from which it may diverge.

5. But a further modulation of this response suggests that this commitment to the existence of an objective reality - whether as a conceptual or semantic entailment, or as a necessary presupposition of the empiricist use of the concept - is imported only if we give an account of the concept of experience in terms of other concepts, or of the word "experience" in terms of other words. If, instead, we accept such explanations only as helping us into a situation where we confront the experience directly - this, here, now - then we can achieve an ostensive grasp of the concept, or of the meaning of the word, which avoids that commitment. In this situation we can reflect, in hallowed empiricist fashion, on what is immediately present and say, "That is an experience". The concept is thus made possible by virtue of direct acquaintance with its instances. Philosophers are now generally warier of such explanations of central concepts, and with good reason. To see what is wrong with this suggestion as to how an ostensive grasp of the word "experience" can avoid unwanted entailments, we must first recognise that an ostensive account of the meaning of a word presupposes a pre-understanding of that which is being ostended as something or other.<sup>15</sup> Consider an example. If I say "that is kind" in order to explain the meaning of the word "kind", I succeed in setting up the appropriate link only if the referent of the demonstrative "that" is understood as an action, say of giving up a seat to an infirm person, rather than as, say, the person's body, the colour of the person's coat, or the expression on the person's face. With a term like "cat", the referent of the demonstrative must be understood as a material

object. In each case of ostensive explanation, we must already understand the referent as falling under a certain general category. Without such an understanding, the term in question cannot acquire its meaning ostensively.

What kind of 'understanding' is involved here? It is perhaps clear that it is not an explicitly articulated understanding of the referent, as falling under a certain general category, which is necessary here. No child learns the term "material object" before learning terms for particular kinds of material object. What is required is the kind of understanding of things possessed by a child who handles, and talks of, chairs and tables, and implicitly understands them as things which can be seen and touched, which persist through space and time, and so on: in short, a child who implicitly understands them as material objects. This kind of understanding provides the context within which alone ostensive explanation of terms for particular kinds of material objects can succeed. I use the expressions "understanding something as such-and-such", "conceiving something as such-and-such" and "bringing something under the concept of such-and-such" as equivalents. Each expression can be used in connection with either implicit or explicit understanding/concept-use. Thus the child above will be said to implicitly understand certain things as material objects, to conceive of them as material objects, and to bring them under the concept of a material object - without possessing the linguistic resources with which to explicitly articulate this understanding/conceptualisation. When such resources become available, that implicit understanding/

conceptualisation can be made explicit: the child will be able to say that some things are material objects, and so on. Now we speak fairly easily of adults implicitly understanding/conceiving of something as such-and-such, where we know that the linguistic resources for the explicit articulation of such conceivings/understandings are available if required. If a hunter sees a furry object and shoots it, only to find that she has shot someone's coat, then we are happy to say that she brought that object, implicitly, under the concept of an animal. No explicit conceptualisation or judgement need have been made, though she possessed the linguistic resources necessary for such explicitation. Philosophers are, in general, less happy to speak of beings who do not have the relevant resources as bringing things, implicitly, under certain concepts. Even here there is a distinction to be made between those beings (e.g. children) who will come to have the abilities required, and those (e.g. dogs) who will not. I will take up the question of the relationship between language and conceptualisation in more detail in Chapter Five. Here, I only want to say that the ostensive explanation of a linguistic term requires for its success an understanding of its referent as being in a certain general category (for example, as an animal, colour, action, material object); and further that in the case of linguistic terms for the general categories themselves, this understanding will of necessity be implicit, rather than explicitly articulated. Let us look at the argument for this.

If ostensive explanations of terms require a prior understanding of the ostensive referents as falling under a certain general category, then what can we say about ostensive explanations of the category terms themselves? Take "material object": we cannot successfully provide an ostensive link between the term and instances of it, unless those instances are already (implicitly) understood as material objects. Without this pre-understanding, the term will not possess its appropriate meaning. The concept must already be implicitly employed, if the term is to be successfully explained.

The term "experience" puts us in a similar position. It can be ostensively explained only in connection with examples which are already (implicitly) understood as falling under the concept of experience. Without this prior understanding, no ostensive explanation can succeed. Indeed, the linguistic term is that through which that understanding comes to explicit articulation.<sup>16</sup> The problem here is this: I have argued that a necessary condition of the success of the ostensive explanation of the term "experience" is that the referent be already understood (if only implicitly) as an experience. Consequently, the entailments carried by the use of the concept of experience are also carried, implicitly, by this implicit use of the concept. Of course, we can only explicitly draw out these implications after we can explicitly use the concept; but those implications must already be present in the implicit use of the concept, in that pre-understanding of the ostensive referent as an experience,

or it could not be the pre-understanding whose explicit articulation in the term "experience" plays such a crucial role in critical empiricism. The entailments concerning the existence of an objective reality remain.

I should note a point which arises from this: we are in a situation where the parallel between talk of concepts and talk of linguistic expressions of those concepts breaks down.<sup>17</sup> I said earlier that I would treat as equivalents the formulations "understanding something as such-and-such", "conceiving something as such-and-such", and "subsuming something under the concept of such-and-such". Each formulation can be used to cover either implicit or explicit concept-use. "Linguistic expression", on the other hand, can be used only to cover explicit concept-use - the ostensive explanation of a linguistic expression can provide the means through which implicit understanding/use of concepts reaches explicit articulation. There is then a sense in which the implicit use of concepts takes priority over their linguistic expression. (I will discuss this further in Chapter Five.)

Let me summarise the stage we have reached after the discussions of the First Objection to our First Attempt at a refutation of empiricism. I have argued that if the explanation of the term "experience" is to succeed, it requires that the referent of the



ostension be at least implicitly conceived of, or understood as, an experience. This concept, or understanding, is that which is expressed, or articulated, by means of the term. For the term to be that which is required by critical empiricism, the concept or understanding of the referent of the ostensive explanation must have a particular nature. That concept or understanding must be of experience as, intentionally, of an objective reality with which it may fail to achieve cognitive consummation. Thus even in an ostensive explanation of the term "experience", it is this concept, or understanding, which is thereby expressed or articulated by means of that term: and this involves the empiricist in the familiar commitments. For the claim that there is experience, entails, given the explanation of the meaning of the term "experience" via direct ostension of examples, that there is an objective reality which may be other than how it is experienced as being. There cannot just be experience, for the term "experience" can play its required role only if it expresses the concept of experience as related to an objective reality with which it may fail to agree. If, on the other hand, we try to limit the pre-understanding of the referent of the ostension so as not to burden ourselves with these entailments, we encounter the same problem as before. That is, we will arrive at an account of the term "experience", which makes it inadequate for its empiricist purposes.

Neither an ostensive nor a lexical explanation of the meaning of "experience" can escape this fact. For the term to be able to fulfil its required critical role in empiricist thought, it must be accepted that, as a matter of conceptual entailment, if there is experience, then there is an objective reality from which it

may diverge. It is not then open to us to claim that the existence of this reality is not on a par with the existence of experience, but is only some kind of construction out of experience; and that therefore this reality does not, perhaps, really exist at all. For this would be to leave us unable to attach the required meaning to the word. If asked to explain the word "experience", we necessarily re-instate objective reality as that from which experience may differ. In whatever sense, and to whatever extent, experience exists, so too does objective reality. We cannot shed conceptual or semantic entailments as a snake sheds unwanted skins. None of the elaborations of the First Objection enumerated in this section can escape this conclusion. But, before we accept the ominously titled First Attempt at refuting empiricism, we need to consider a Second Objection to it, which will force us to deepen the argument against critical empiricism.

### The Second Objection

The second objection to the refutation of radical empiricism offered above develops the argument by means of a very simple suggestion. Let us accept the commitment to an objective reality carried by the empiricist use of the concept of experience. Even so, this does not settle scepticism about any particular claim concerning that reality: for example, about the claim that I am doing the washing in the kitchen. Indeed, the suggestion runs, this talk of an objective reality is only a substantivising of talk of how things really are (in possible contrast with how they

are experienced as being); and it may be that it is really the case that there exist no actual items which are independent of experience. What this brings out is the fact that we want more than just a substantivisation of how things are: we want items which actually exist, and whose existence is not merely a matter of their being experienced, but something which can carry on whether they are experienced or not. Correlated with this 'ontological' independence is the notion of epistemological objectivity with regard to these items; that is, that how things are with such items will not necessarily coincide with how they are experienced as being. The objection presented here is that it may be the case that the objective reality, which we have secured with such painful argument, is empty of any actual items independent of experience. That is, it may be that how things are differs from how they are experienced as being in this way: it seems that there are objects, people and so on, in a world whose existence is independent of experience; whereas really there is absolutely nothing beyond experience itself - no people, objects and so forth - just nothing. The empiricist sceptic may understandably feel that an objective reality with nothing in it will do as well as no objective reality at all; indeed, may feel that this was the point all along - perhaps experience is all there is. The commitment to the existence of an epistemologically objective reality has not been shown to involve a commitment to the actual existence of anything independent of experience, and without this transition, the substantivising of talk about how things really are gives us an 'objective reality' in far too meagre a sense.

In this situation, where the existence of experience is acknowledged along with a reality about which nothing has been established, the space for theories about the relationship between experience and claims about the existence of material objects (rather than of 'objective reality' in general) is merely re-opened. Perhaps our ordinary view of the material world has ultimately the status of a theory to account for the character of experience. And so on. Semantic or conceptual entailments, it can be argued, cannot by themselves get us very far.

What are we to do in face of the simplicity of this objection? The arguments about whether the use of the concept of experience carries, via conceptual entailments, inescapable commitments to the existence of an objective reality seem to have no force here. For this objector can accept all those arguments, and all those commitments, and just say that they do not amount to very much. The phrase "objective reality", with its familiar solidity, has misled us into thinking that we have established the existence of the external world and its full-blooded inhabitants, whereas what we have in fact is a phrase which merely substantivises one side of the epistemological distinction between how things are, and how they are experienced as being. This rather ghostly 'objective reality' may not be inhabited at all, and yet could still play the required role in critical empiricist philosophy. If we are to get a commitment to the existence of that world, with its peoples and things, which we know and love, then we need a second attempt at a refutation - an attempt which takes into account this objection and thereby deepens the discussion. I aim to show that this second attempt succeeds.

## The Second Attempt

To see how we can begin to counter the second objection to the first attempt at a refutation, and so to move towards a conclusive refutation, consider the following thought: "There is experience". No empiricist can deny this, and remain an empiricist. We have seen moreover that, given our account of the concept of experience required for the critical purposes of empiricism, this entails that there is an objective reality. This entailment claim was defended against variants of one objection. The second objection above showed us, however, that this does not help us much against the scepticism associated with radical empiricism. If the discovery of conceptual entailments advances the cause hardly at all, what other options are open? At work in much of the thinking concerned with transcendental arguments is the notion of a presuppositional argument.<sup>12</sup> In developing such an argument against radical empiricism, I shall make some brief comments as to the nature of this kind of argument.

## Presuppositional Arguments

The notion of presupposition does work in such a variety of contexts - the links between which are sometimes obscure - that there seems little chance of providing a general account of presupposition which will fit them all. Still, if we investigate a little this variety, it may give us some pointers relevant to our present purposes. Let us look at some well-known examples.

Strawson, in arguing against Russell's analysis of referring expressions, claims in effect that, in an ascription of either

truth or falsity to the sentence "The King of France is wise", it is presupposed, rather than asserted, that there is at present a King of France.<sup>19</sup> We could say that the existence of such a king is a necessary condition of both the truth, and the 'straight-forward' or 'minimal' falsity of the sentence.<sup>20</sup> In his examination of speech-acts,<sup>21</sup> Searle can be taken as arguing that the felicitous performance of illocutionary acts presupposes that certain 'preparatory' conditions obtain: for example, the felicitous performance of the act of asking someone to open the door presupposes that the door is not already open. If this condition does not obtain, the order falls flat on its face. More generally, it can be argued that any serious utterance presupposes that the words are being used with certain meanings rather than others.<sup>22</sup> Unless this condition obtains the utterance will not have any particular meaning, and so hardly qualifies as serious. A further step will bring us closer to our main concerns.

Any thought or statement presupposes the existence of concepts which are differentially linked with an extra-conceptual realm (i.e. a realm which consists of something besides concepts themselves). How can this claim be justified? We can start by saying that a thought or statement must have a specifiable content. This is not to be taken in the sense of an empirical 'cash-value'; but as a way of saying that thoughts and statements must be thoughts or statements that something or other. Thus radical empiricism claims that it is possible that there exist no material objects. But in order for a thought or statement to be about something in this way, there must be some kind of relationship between the thought and what it is about. That is, in order to be a particular thought or

statement, the thought or statement must refer beyond itself.

To do this in a particular way, and so to be a particular thought, the thought must have a particular relationship with what is beyond it - ultimately, with an extra-conceptual realm. Insofar as a thought is structured (in that it comprises certain components, which can also be components of other thoughts) we can say that each component concept must be linked with a realm beyond itself in a way which differentiates it from other concepts. These links may be with other thoughts or statements (the sentential connectives, for example), or with other concepts (a bachelor is an unmarried man), or directly with features of the realm about which such thoughts, composed of such concepts, are. Without fully specifying the nature of this link, or the nature of this extra-conceptual realm, we have to accept that thoughts and concepts must be somehow linked with something other than thoughts or concepts.<sup>23</sup> Otherwise, they would not be thoughts or concepts at all. This is not to say that, when thinking about a unicorn (which I perhaps mistakenly thought I saw), there must be a unicorn that my thought is about. The point is that in order for me to have the thought at all, the concept "unicorn" must be somehow related to an extra-conceptual realm (concepts of material objects which are themselves more directly related to such a realm, such as "horse" and "horn", or patterns of sense-data associated with the concept "unicorn", are two of the candidates for the post). For now, we can say that this link, between concepts and an extra-conceptual realm, is to be understood by analogy with the semantic link between words and the extra-linguistic realm. Without it, the concepts are vacuous, just as the words would be meaningless. Just as the

semantic link makes possible talk about the extra-linguistic realm, in particular about those aspects with which the semantic link is established, so the link with concepts makes possible thought about the extra-conceptual realm, in particular about those aspects with which that link is established: those aspects are subsumed under the relevant concepts. In virtue of the analogy I shall hereafter use the term 'semantic' in inverted commas when talking of the required link between concepts and the extra-conceptual realm.

It may be worth looking at least for family resemblances between this last argument, and the other arguments concerning presuppositions mentioned earlier. In each case we have a starting-point, and move to a condition which must hold for the original feature to exist. We could not, for example, have the 'straightforward' falsity of a statement with a referring expression unless that expression genuinely refers. It is by our concept of this feature (of 'straightforward' falsity, a successful speech-act, etc.) that we can judge whether a certain condition is necessary for its existence or not, and these concepts are firmly set in the context of activities which give them their point. Thus the way people communicate with each other provides us with the concept of a successful (felicitous) speech-act, and Searle's contribution is to bring out what is at least implicit in that concept, and present it as a set of conditions without which a particular kind of successful speech-act would not succeed. These arguments all aim to make more explicit our grasp of certain features, and, correlatively, to show us the necessary foundations, or presuppositions, on which they rest.



Even so, it is no part of my case that all contexts, in which we are tempted to talk of presuppositions, can be tidied up into one neat box. There are important distinctions. For example, the presupposition that there is a king of France, which is said to be made by both the statement "The King of France is wise" and its internal negation, has sometimes seemed to be a matter of the logical form of the relevant statements, and so properly grasped as an entailment.<sup>24</sup> There seems little chance of dealing in the same way with the argument that the thought "There is experience" presupposes that its component concepts are 'semantically' linked with some extra-conceptual realm. Indeed, I should like now to bring out further the distinction between this last argument, and cases which rely primarily on considerations of conceptual implication, or logical form.

Consider again the thought "There is experience". I have argued that this thought, in common with any thought, presupposes that its component concepts are 'semantically' linked with something beyond themselves. I have already mentioned the difficulty in understanding this presupposition as a matter of logical form. Neither, however, can it be seen as resting on the entailments carried by the concepts themselves which constitute the thought. Further, the fact that it is a necessary condition of the thoughts being a thought at all, that its concepts possess the above-mentioned 'semantic' link, is not on a par with the necessary conditions of material implication. We are dealing with what might be called "essentially necessary conditions". But if these do not stem from any of the three sources so far mentioned, on what are they founded?

To give ourselves more of a perspective on this question, let us look at another example.<sup>25</sup> The statement "I think" says very little; it entails virtually nothing in view of either its logical form or the meaning of the words. Nevertheless, it presupposes a great deal. The very existence of that statement - and of any other - presupposes the existence of a language containing general concepts and referring expressions, which in turn presuppose the possibility of using words in a rule-governed way, which in turn presupposes that memory can sometimes be relied on. I do not want here to evaluate this argument (though I find much to recommend it), but to work out on what grounds this chain of presuppositions is established. It is not logical form or word-meaning which allows us to trace these necessary conditions. Rather, it is an unfolding of our understanding of what it is to be a statement. Perhaps our general, explicit, concept of a statement concerns the saying of something about something. But the transcendental argument sketched above does not rely only on the explicit concept and its entailments. It goes further to uncover some of the conditions without which nothing could be said about anything. How could we make statements, and so say something about something, unless those statements contained at least two components: a referring expression which identifies what is being talked about, and a general term through which what is to be said about it gets said? The argument then takes up this notion of a general concept, and unfolds it to reveal that unless they can be used in a rule-governed way, general terms could not be used to say anything about anything. How could they, if nothing governed what counted as correct and incorrect use? In this sort of way, we can uncover some of the presuppositions

of the statement "I think", by deepening our understanding of what is involved in the notion of a statement, and uncovering the necessary conditions of something being a statement. We check the results of the deduction by seeing whether, if those conditions do not obtain, it is possible for there to be a statement.

Having said all that, it is clear that this kind of presuppositional argument relies heavily on the initial grasp of the concept which sets everything in motion. In this case, it is the concept of a statement. And we might want to ask what happens when people seem to have different, even conflicting, understandings of that first concept. How would we justify our understanding? This, as we have seen, is a question which is important with regard to the notion of experience, and will be considered in the next chapter in connection with the notion of thought. Since it is not my present purpose to evaluate or develop the argument outlined above, I will leave this question, and turn back to the earlier argument, concerning the thought "There is experience".

This argument<sup>26</sup> can be seen as uncovering the presuppositions of the thought "There is experience", not by looking at its logical form, or the 'content' of its concepts, but by unfolding our initial understanding of what it is to be a thought. Thus I suggested that a thought must be a thought that something or other, and that this cannot be possible unless the thought has components (concepts) which are 'semantically' linked with an extra-conceptual realm. Without that link, nothing could be thought at all; there

could be no thought. (I must again note that I did not have in mind any particular account of the nature of this extra-conceptual realm, or of the 'semantic' link). If this argument succeeds, however, attention will focus on its starting-point. Suppose someone else has a different initial understanding of what it is to be a thought? My answer here is that empiricists must conceive themselves as thinking about something. If not, there is no case to answer: their 'statements' would be only vocal emissions about nothing.<sup>27</sup> If empiricists accept that they do not have thoughts about anything (not even about experience), we can justifiably ignore them. We can only take them as presenting us with a case to answer, if we take them as having thoughts of the kind outlined above.

This account of the kind of presuppositional argument with which I am concerned runs close to Charles Taylor's account of the nature of transcendental arguments,<sup>28</sup> and it will be helpful to compare them, so as to be clearer as to the nature of the starting-point and argument of this second attempt at refuting radical empiricism. Taylor talks of transcendental deductions as chains of indispensability chains, founded on features which are themselves indispensable to experience as we conceive it. Taylor says that our understanding of the concept of experience is such that we "just see that experience must be of something, to be experience";<sup>29</sup> and sees Kant as taking the argument from there to the necessary employment in experience of the categories. I want to make the following points. First; the structure of

Taylor's argument is like that of the two presuppositional arguments already introduced:<sup>30</sup> it aims to articulate our understanding of what it is for something to be, in this case, an experience, and to trace those conditions without which something could not be an experience. It begins with the grasp we have of the notion of experience, and gradually unfolds it, thereby deepening that grasp. Taylor argues that this was Kant's strategy, and that it crops up also in the writings of people such as Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein.

Second: the starting-point of Taylor's transcendental arguments differs from that of the arguments discussed earlier. He begins with our initial conception of experience, whereas the earlier arguments began with our initial conceptions of thought and statement, respectively. I will discuss the issue of where to begin transcendental philosophy at length in Chapter Four.

Third: Taylor does not follow up the question of how we could justify holding on to a particular conception of what it is to be an experience: "we just see that experience must be of something to be experience"<sup>31</sup> though he does suggest that this represents "an insight we have into our own activity".<sup>32</sup> In Chapter Two I developed an account of this 'insight' to show that a particular concept of experience must be used if critical empiricist philosophy is to be possible: it is an insight into the nature of critical philosophical activity that is required here.

Fourth: Taylor comes to a conclusion like that of Chapter One; namely, that arguments which begin by considering experience cannot hope to refute empiricist scepticism. The most they can

achieve is an account of how things must be experienced as being, as Kant himself fully recognised. In this second attempt at refuting empiricism, I aim to provide an argument which, by beginning with a consideration, not of experience itself, but of the thought "there is experience", will genuinely refute the sceptic. By starting from a thought whose very existence is essential to empiricist philosophy, we can show that there must be an external world populated with external objects. Empiricist scepticism is possible only if false. Let us now look at the argument.

#### The Possibility of Empiricism

Let us take up the threads again. I argued in the last section that a necessary condition of the very existence of the thought that there is experience - as of any other thought - was that its component concepts be 'semantically' linked to an extra-conceptual realm. Without saying more about the nature of this link, or of this realm, I argued that without the link nothing could be thought about anything: there could be no thought, in fact, at all. If that argument succeeds, then it leads us to consider its application to the concept of experience itself. This concept - a component of the thought "There is experience" - is absolutely essential to empiricism. It must therefore possess a 'semantic' link with something beyond it, if empiricism is to be possible.<sup>33</sup> We can now develop our argument by asking for the necessary conditions of the possibility of such a link. Since the relationship 'being a necessary condition of' is transitive, these conditions will be necessary conditions of the possibility of empiricism and empiricist scepticism themselves. Let us, in preparation for this development, remind ourselves of the nature of the concept with which we are dealing.

In Chapter Two, I argued that the concept of experience, if it is to play its part in critical empiricist philosophy, must involve a central reference to reality, as that from which experience may diverge. If this is so, does it not offer us a quick solution to the problem? Can we not say that the 'semantic' link, between the concept of experience and an extra-conceptual realm, is established through that concept being explained as "that which may diverge from reality", and through the concept of reality having its own 'semantic' link with an extra-conceptual realm? We need to look at this closely. This suggestion takes for granted that the concept of reality has, independently of the concept of experience, a 'semantic' link with something beyond it. But is this so? Certainly we have concepts of reality (or perhaps aspects of one total concept) which are apparently independent of the concept of experience: For example, what is the case, as against what should be the case, or against what could be the case. But neither of these is the epistemological concept of reality which we need, in order to make possible the concept of experience as possibly diverging from reality, and so to open up the issue of justifying our claims to knowledge. This epistemological concept of how things really are cannot, however, have any sense - it cannot be a concept - unless it is grasped in its, possibly divergent, relationship with how things are experienced as being. The reference from the concept of experience to that of reality must be reciprocated, or neither concept is possible. The empiricist must work with this conceptually interdependent pair.

We are now left with the question: how is the 'semantic' link, between this pair of concepts (or, words with the required meaning), and an extra-conceptual realm, possible? Neither the concept of experience, nor that of reality, can be 'semantically' linked with an extra-conceptual realm independently of the other concept. Such a link must then be made between the interdependent pair of concepts and that realm. How?

Not, certainly, by virtue of each being understood in terms of the other. If experience were understood merely as that which may fail to match up with reality, and reality were understood merely as that with which experience may fail to match up, then we would have merely an empty circle. There must be a link between the concepts and something other than the concepts themselves, or there will be no concepts at all. If the words are explained only in terms of each other, with no semantic link to something beyond them, they can have no meaning. But if this does not work, are there not other concepts which can mediate between the concept of experience and an extra-conceptual realm? For example, could we not talk of experience as a mental state of persons? Clearly, we could try to do this, but it will run up against a difficulty which is insuperable for the empiricist. For if we use ordinary concepts like these to account for the possibility of the concept of experience, we will be in a position like that which arose in discussing the First Attempt at refuting empiricism. That is, the use of these everyday concepts will carry everyday commitments -



in this example, to the existence of persons - which an empiricist must try to keep clear of. Generally, the radical empiricist tries to remove the commitment to the existence of independent objects in an external world, which is made by using ordinary everyday concepts. The empiricist does this by recasting ordinary thought and talk into terms of the concept of experience.<sup>34</sup> But if the concept of experience is itself possible only by virtue of its relationships with such concepts, then the commitment they carry cannot be later recast in that way. The radical empiricist's position, that perhaps all there is, is experience, would be untenable. If the 'semantic' link between the conceptual pair of experience and reality, and an extra-conceptual realm, cannot be provided either by way of their conceptual interdefinition or by defining them in terms of other concepts, can we not try a more direct route? Could we not try to establish one or other of these concepts independently, by providing a direct link with an extra-conceptual realm (for example, with a case of how things really are, or of how they are experienced as being), and then giving an understanding of the other in terms of the first? This will not work. To begin with, it will run into problems like those which emerged during the First Attempt at refuting empiricism, concerning the way ostensive accounts of the concept of experience already presuppose the, albeit implicit, use of that concept. Second, it ignores the fact that, as argued above, each concept is what it is only by virtue of its relationship with the other.

If we were in possession of a concept of experience, or of reality, which did not already contain this internal reference,

then it could not be the concept we require. Neither concept can be established independently of the other and then pushed into a relationship with the other: they come together, or not at all. The conclusion we seem drawn to, is that the required 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and an extra-conceptual realm is possible neither by means of direct ostension, nor of mutual definition in terms of the concept of reality, nor of definition in terms of other concepts. The prospect is bleak: surely we cannot conclude that the concept of experience, and so empiricism itself, is not possible at all. But what alternatives are there?

We can get out of this corner only in this way. We must recognise that the conceptual pair - "experience"/"reality" - can avoid being vacuous only by being 'semantically' linked, as a pair, with an extra-conceptual realm. But the relevant feature of this extra-conceptual realm cannot be just an instance of how things are experienced as being, or just an instance of how things really are. We have seen that neither of these can by themselves provide for the possibility of either one of the concepts, let alone for the interrelated pair. If this pair of concepts is to escape vacuity (and if the corresponding linguistic terms are to possess their required meaning), then the salient feature of that extra-conceptual realm must be a situation, within which how things are, and how they are experienced as being, are distinct but interrelated aspects. That is, not only are the concepts of experience and reality inescapably interrelated; but how things are experienced as being, and how they really are, must be interrelated aspects of the extra-conceptual realm. It is the

'semantic' link between the conceptual pair on the one hand, and the situation in which how things are and how they are experienced as being are themselves interrelated on the other, which makes that conceptual pair possible. The concepts come together, in relation to such situations - indeed, the understanding of these situations will be articulated through these concepts. Having exhausted the alternative accounts of how the 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and an extra-conceptual realm is possible, the above account is the only possibility left. The link between situations like that characterised above, and the interdependent pair of concepts of experience and reality, is thus a necessary condition of the existence of the thought that there is experience, and so of empiricism itself. But given the critical attention accorded to those alternative accounts, I can hardly leave the matter there: indeed, it is not at all clear what would be gained by doing so. Let us have a closer look at the type of situation which is to be so important to the argument.

The concept of experience is to be possible in virtue of a 'semantic' link with a situation, within which how things are and how they are experienced as being are distinct, but interrelated, aspects. What more can we say about this? First, we can say that if it is to be the kind of situation in connection with which the concepts of experience and reality are made possible, and in connection with which the words possess their required meaning, then there must be some distinction to be made, in that situation, between how things are, and how things are experienced as being. As long as there is no such distinction to be made - that is, as

long as experience matches reality - then there is nothing for the concepts expressed by the terms "experience" and "reality" to latch on to. They can have no purchase on an extra-conceptual realm such as would rescue them from vacuity: the concepts cannot exist in such circumstances, nor the words have their required meaning. The words "experience" and "reality", then, can have their meaning - can express the relevant concepts - only by being semantically linked with the kind of situation in which how things really are actually diverges from how things are experienced as being: that is, the kind of situation which we call experiential error. Only by being 'semantically' linked with situations of experiential error, where there is an actual divergence between experience and reality, is the concept of experience possible. Without such a link, therefore, empiricism itself would not be possible. We have reached a stage which marks a considerable advance on the idea that we can account for the possibility of the concept of experience in terms of a direct relation with 'this, here, now'; but before developing the argument, let me say two things about the nature of this requirement for a 'semantic' link.

First: the need for this link is atemporal. It is not of a merely causal nature: that is, it is not just the case, for example, that no-one can arrive at the concept of experience without their mind being stimulated by a few cases of experiential error. It is rather a formal, atemporal requirement uncovered by tracing the essentially necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience. Even so, such atemporality carries consequences regarding temporal sequences. That is, if the concept of experience must be 'semantically' linked with cases of experiential error, it

is clear that the emergence of the concept cannot temporally precede the occurrence of such case: at the very least they arise simultaneously.<sup>35</sup> Second, semantic theory can sometimes give the impression that semantic relationships between words and things are an autonomous affair, independent of the fact that words are involved in thinking and speaking about things. We need here to keep sight of the fact that the function of words, and of the concepts they express, has been determined by the argument so far as being that of enabling thought and discussion to occur. It is the possibility of radical empiricist thought or discourse which is at stake. This simple point has an implication for the argument of the following sections. I can have the concept of something - say, of a unicorn, - without having any direct awareness of it, if the 'semantic' link between concept and world is made indirectly (by means, for example, of other concepts, such as those of a horse and a horn). But the present situation is one where the link between the concept and instances of it must be direct, as indirect links cannot satisfy the radical empiricists purpose.<sup>36</sup> A direct 'semantic' link must be such as to enable the thought "That is an experience" to occur - or the point of the link, to make radical empiricism possible, is lost. If the 'semantic' link is like this, it must involve an awareness (of some kind) of the instance of the concept with which the link is to obtain. In the present case, a direct link between the concept of experience, and instances of experience as components of experiential error, must involve an awareness of how things are, and of how they are experienced as being, so that the latter can be rejected. That is, if the link is to make

possible thought about experience (and thence radical empiricism itself), it must be a link between the instance of experience and the concept, where the latter is a constituent of a judgement (e.g. "That was just how things seemed to be") which is embodied in an awareness of how things are experienced as being. Now it may turn out that this supposed awareness of how things really are, on the basis of which how things are experienced as being is rejected, is in fact non-veridical. It might be for example, that I reject an experience of seeing a piece of brown mat on the floor, on the basis of touching it and being made aware that it was a furry animal. This would provide an instance of experiential error, which would make possible a 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and an instance of it. Nevertheless, further inspection might later reveal that there was not a furry animal on the floor, but only a warm fur coat. The 'awareness' of how things really are, would turn out to be non-veridical. We can imagine a long succession of such 'undeceptions'. It is clear, then, that the use of the concept of how things really are, does not of itself guarantee the truth of the judgement in which it is employed. It is not by this route that the existence of the external world is achieved. (I shall say more about this shortly). Without such a guarantee, the term "awareness" might be misleading, since it normally carries an implication of truth: if I am aware that X, then it is true that X. To remove this normal implication of the term "awareness" - that things are as they are taken to be in the awareness - I shall talk in future of a (presumed) awareness of how things are. The main point here, though, is that without such a (presumed) awareness

of how things are, and of how they are experienced as being, the 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and instances of it would not make thought about experience possible. Without this possibility, there can be no radical empiricism, so that the purpose of making the link would be negated. Having made these two points, let us return to consider a response to the argument so far.

A Response to the argument (so far) of the Second Attempt - the 'Incoherence' theory of error

In this Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism, I have argued that the concept of experience is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations of experiential error, where how things are is different from how they are experienced as being. One response to this argument takes the form of trying to recast talk of error into terms of experience itself. It goes like this. In talking about experiential error, I have used the terms/concepts "experience" and "reality". Now, possessing the concept of experience, we can, this response argues, construe cases of experiential error in the following way. We can say (along with, for example, Kant, Husserl and Ayer), that one experience has failed to fit in with others, so as to maintain a coherent view of the world. This experience is therefore to be rejected as non-veridical; the judgement implicit in it denied. This response thus tries to show how we can have a grasp of the notion of experiential error in terms of experience alone. Error is to be understood essentially in terms of lack of coherence among experiences; and veridicality in terms of such coherence as gives

us a unified view of the world. We do not really need the notion of reality, this response continues, since the distinction between how things are experienced as being, and how they are in reality, can be provided for in terms of experience alone. After all, in rejecting an experience on the basis of a presumed awareness of how things really are ("it seemed as though there was a mat there, but in fact it was a dog"), we are merely rejecting one experience on the basis of its lack of coherence with another (the presumed awareness). Indeed, as we have already seen, that presumed awareness may itself be rejected as merely an experience, on the basis of a further presumed awareness ("it wasn't really a dog, but a warm coat"). Nor does there seem to be a fixed limit to such a succession of 'undeceptions'. Considerations like this lead empiricists to say that all we have here is a series of experiences, none of which carries an intrinsic guarantee of veridicality. The empiricists add that our notions of truth and falsehood can then only amount to the coherence and incoherence of experiences in such a series. Error, therefore, for such an empiricist, consists merely in the failure of an experience to 'fit in' with other experiences in a series. We cannot, however, accept this response to the argument against radical empiricism, for reasons already foreshadowed.<sup>37</sup> The account this response offers of experiential error cannot adequately represent the situation here. For that account presupposes the availability of the concept of experience; and this concept is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' relation to cases of experiential error, of which there must be some prior grasp. Any attempt to analyse our primary grasp of experiential



error in terms of experience itself, effectively removes one of the essentially necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, and consequently of that attempt itself. Any empiricist attempt to recover the essentially necessary conditions of empiricism in terms of the concept of experience - pulling itself up by its own bootstraps - presupposes that which it seeks to account for, and so cannot provide an adequate account of the possibility of the concept of experience. We can, then, reject this response to the Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism.

Before I consider a development of our argument - which will lead us to a successful refutation of radical empiricism - let me offer a brief reminder of what has been said of the concepts that must be used within experience; in other words, of the intentional character of experience. In order for a distinction between how things are and how they are experienced as being to be possible, experience must be articulated by concepts of items such that how things are with them may differ from how they are experienced as being (Strawson's "concepts of the objective"). Further, since the concept of experience is possible only if such concepts are employed within experience, these concepts themselves cannot themselves contain any implicit or explicit reference, or be reducible, to the concept of experience. They must be, for example, concepts of rocks, trees and such things, whose conception does not presuppose the concept of experience. For if this were not the case, the question of the possibility of the concept of experience would just be pushed back a stage,

rather than answered. Experience must be, intentionally, of items such that how things are, with regard to their existence, qualities and operations, is independent of how they are experienced as being. Experience must be, intentionally, of an 'external world' in the sense we want. With this in mind, let us consider a development of the argument against radical empiricism.

### Experience and its Negation

To approach this development of the argument of the Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism, consider two examples of experiential error: (1) "It seemed that there was an oasis before me, but really there was nothing there". (2) "It looked as though it was my coat, but that was not in fact the case". In such cases, how things are experienced as being is rejected on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things are. But this awareness of how things are is not merely negative, it is not just an awareness that how things are experienced as being is not, in fact, the case. Consider the "nothing" in the first example.<sup>38</sup> Was there absolutely nothing there? No; there was plenty of sand, and the sun beating down, but, crucially, no oasis. The "nothing" plays its part only within a wider context. Or consider the final clause in the second example. Is this a bare negation of the renegade experience? No; it was brown, and furry, but it was a sleeping dog and not my coat. In such cases, the rejection of how things are experienced as being is not based on a bare awareness that this is not the case. It is based on a determinate

awareness of how things are, which is in itself positive, but which excludes how things are experienced as being. For instance, if that brown, furry thing on the chair is a dog, then it cannot be my coat; and my seeming to see my coat was merely a non-veridical experience. Now it is, I hope, clear from the argument of the last paragraph, that this awareness of how things, positively, are, must be articulated through "concepts of the objective"; that is concepts of items such that their existence, operations, and generally how things are with them, is independent of how they are experienced as being.<sup>39</sup> In such cases, then, an understanding of how things are experienced as being, as differing from how they really are, is based on an awareness of how things are with certain independent items in the 'external world'.

Now this seems to open up a useful development of the argument so far. For it suggests that cases of experiential error must, if they are to provide for the 'semantic' link with the concept of experience, be situations in which how things are experienced as being, diverges from how things really are with independent items in an external world. In accordance with previous arguments, we cannot, on pain of circularity, recast either talk of this divergence, or talk of these independent items, into terms of experience. The concept of experience already presupposes the use of concepts of such items. Consequently, it would look, according to this development of the argument, as if we are committed to the existence of an 'external world' containing independent items. That is, it seems that we have a case for saying that the concept of experience is possible only by virtue of a 'semantic' link with instances of

error, where how things are with actual independent items in an external world differs from how they are experienced as being. So that it seems that the existence of such items and such a world, is presupposed as an essentially necessary condition of the very possibility of the concept of experience, and so of radical empiricism itself. Radical empiricism would be thereby refuted, since its very existence (the possibility of its central concept) would require the falsity of the claim that there is, perhaps, only experience. The objective reality, to which the empiricist is committed,<sup>4a</sup> would have been shown to be not empty, but populated. This is the conclusion we want; but if it is based only on a brief consideration of two examples of experiential error, then it is by no means clear that we have indeed established a chain of necessary conditions here. To assess whether we can indeed establish that the falsity of radical empiricism is a necessary condition of its very possibility, we need to test this suggested development of the argument.

We can test it first against an objection that looks like this. We may accept, the objection runs, that the concept of experience is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with cases of experiential error, in which how things are, and how they are experienced as being, are already related. You have then suggested that these cases must be such that how things are experienced as being, diverges from how they are, in respect of independent items in an external world; so that the existence of the concept of experience presupposes the existence of an external world in the full-blooded sense you want. However, the objection

continues, this development of the Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism remains at the level of a suggestion, rather than an argument, since you have not fully considered whether there may be alternative accounts of experiential error, which provide for the 'semantic' link with the concept of experience without involving a commitment to the existence of an external world. In the face of this objection, we must then look at what alternative accounts of experiential error there may be.

So far, the suggestion has built on the argument that the concepts in which experience is articulated must be concepts of items such that, first, how things are with regard to those items is independent of experience; and second, these concepts cannot contain any reference, or be reducible, to the concept of experience. The suggestion is then that the cases of experiential error we need, are cases in which how things are experienced as being is rejected on the basis of a (presumed) positive awareness of how things actually are with regard to those independent items. But the objection above raises the issue of whether this is reasonably so. What alternative is there? The only alternative account would be one where how things are experienced as being was dismissed on the basis, not of a positive awareness of how things are with independent items in an external world, but of a bare (presumed) awareness that how things are, is just that there exists nothing other than experience: the 'external world' is empty. If experiential error could be like this, we would have the link between the concept of experience and instances of experiential error, without the commitment to things in an external world: we would just have that commitment to an

epistemologically objective, but empty, world which first prompted this Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism.<sup>41</sup> The radical empiricist could then claim that how things really are may be different from how they are experienced as being, and that it is at least possible that there exists only experience, with no actual independent items in an objective realm. This claim would depend on the suggestion that there could be cases of experiential error which involved both how things are experienced as being ("it seemed as if my coat was on the floor"), and how things are - where the grasp of how things are consists merely in the bare awareness that there is no inhabited 'external world' at all. I want to make two preliminary points here. First, I find it extremely hard to make any sense of the notion of a bare awareness that there exists nothing other than experience. Second, if the radical empiricist case depends on such a possibility, then it presumably leads, not just to the conclusion that there may exist nothing other than experience, but to the conclusion that there is in fact nothing other than experience. This would be a stronger claim than most empiricists would want to make. Nevertheless, in order to establish the development of the Second Attempt suggested above, we need to show that this alternative is not available.

Let us consider this notion of a bare awareness that there is nothing (beyond experience) more closely. A natural way to approach it, might be as a particular sort of sensory awareness, in which nothing is seen, heard, felt, touched or tasted. An immediate difficulty with this approach is that it presupposes the existence of the body, at a stage such that this existence cannot,

for familiar reasons, be later recast in terms of the concept of experience. This would then give us at least one entity independent of experience, and so involve the kind of commitment that the present alternative aims to avoid. But if we drop this natural approach (which also runs into the problems about to be discussed), what sense can we make of the notion of an awareness that there exists nothing (other than experience)? All we can be left with is some kind of intellectual revelation of non-being, in the light of which the putative awareness - that, say, my coat is on the chair in the kitchen - is rejected as merely a non-veridical experience. Hard as I find it to make anything sensible of this idea, I want to make sure that it does not provide a tenable alternative to the account of experiential error put forward in developing the Second Attempt.

To do this, look first at some everyday examples of judgements that there is nothing. 1. My daughter wants something to drink, I look all over the house, in and out of cupboards, but find nothing. 2. A teacher has been told that a certain child may be a bully. She observes her behaviour in school activities, play and work, but finds nothing to confirm the suggestion. Each of the cases shares two features. First, the 'nothing', of which awareness is reached, is determined with reference to a particular concept (which governs the search). Thus in case 1, I do not find nothing at all, but nothing to drink - or even, to specify it further, nothing which is suitable for my daughter to drink. In case 2, the teacher does not find nothing at all, but no evidence of bullying. Second, there is in each case a certain horizon

within which 'nothing' is discovered. In case 1, my search is limited to the house - I either have not thought of going, or cannot be bothered to go, to the shops. In case 2, the teacher limits her observations to behaviour at school - she does not follow the child home to seek evidence of her bullying her neighbours, or family; nor does she seek out historical evidence of such behaviour. In the light of these features - the particular respect, and the limited horizon, in which nothing is found - we can see the problems of the bare awareness of nothing, proposed as part of an alternative account of experiential error. For it seems that we are considering the idea of an awareness of nothing which is neither within a limited horizon, nor determined in a particular respect. Let me briefly consider the first of these points. The idea of an awareness of nothing which is not limited to a certain horizon (e.g. "nothing in this house", "nothing in this person's behaviour at school"), has as a necessary correlate the idea of unlimited, or infinite, awareness: of an awareness which scans the whole realm of possible being. While some thinkers would argue that it is precisely this sort of awareness that is attributed to God, I, along with others such as Hegel and Sartre, regard this notion as an untenable abstraction. Rather than arguing for this claim (with which most empiricists would, I imagine, agree), I should like instead to focus the discussion more on the second point (concerning a 'nothing' which is not determined in a particular respect), by making the following remark. A reply to the discussion of the first point might be that the proposed awareness of nothing, is



not within an unlimited horizon, but rather limited to the context of the external world. It is the awareness that there is nothing in the external world which is at issue.

This reply, however, raises the question of whether an awareness which is limited to the horizon of the objective, external world, already presupposes the concept of experience. Let us now consider this question in connection with the second of the above points.

This point concerns the idea of an awareness of absolutely nothing; that is, of an awareness of nothing which is not determined in respect of a particular concept (e.g. "nothing to drink", "no behavioural evidence of bullying"): it is in the light of this awareness of nothing, that how things are experienced as being is dismissed as non-veridical. If we look closer, however, it begins to emerge that an awareness that there is absolutely nothing will not fit the bill. If there were such an awareness (and I should recall my difficulty with making something sensible of this idea), then it could not provide the basis for dismissing how things are experienced as being, as merely non-veridical experience. For this dismissal involves acceptance that there is not absolutely nothing - there is, at the very least, how things are experienced as being. An awareness of absolutely nothing could not accommodate experience itself: it could not provide for the account of experiential error which is required here. This awareness that there is absolutely nothing requires qualification if it is to serve its intended purpose.

The qualification it needs - which provides the concept with respect to which the 'nothing' is found - must be this: there must be an awareness that there exists absolutely nothing other than experience itself. It is on this basis that any positive claim

about independent items in an objective world would be rejected, thus making possible instances of experiential error. 'Semantic' linking with these instances would in turn make possible the concept of experience. But this will not do. This qualification of the awareness of nothing, does save us from the waste land of an absolute, unconditioned non-being. But it does so only at the cost of presupposing exactly that which it was to provide for, namely, the existence of the concept of experience. This proposed awareness that there is nothing other than experience must, if it is to do its job, employ, if only implicitly, the concept of experience. It cannot then provide part of an adequate account of the possibility of that concept. The alternative account of experiential error has thus been shown to be untenable. The development of the Second Attempt has survived its first test. Let us reflect on the position so far.

The concept of experience, and hence radical empiricism itself, is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with cases of experiential error. These are cases where how things are experienced as being diverges from how they are. What the recent argument has tried to show is that these must be cases, where how things are experienced as being is dismissed as non-veridical, on the basis of a positive (presumed) awareness of how things are with actual independent items in an external, objective world. Such awareness carries a commitment to the existence of that 'external world', as necessarily presupposed by any use of the concept of experience. Talk of that world and its inhabitants cannot, then, be recast into terms of that concept. The very meaningfulness of radical empiricist discourse (and scepticism), thus presupposes its own

falsity. The concept of experience is not possible unless there is an external world in the full-bodied sense we want. If this is the argument of the Second Attempt at refuting radical empiricism, let us give it a second test.

This second test involves facing the objection that, having got the concept of experience, we can then employ it in a reassessment of our awareness of how things are, in such a way as to cancel the apparent commitment to the external world. For recall the examples of experiential error given earlier.<sup>42</sup> Is it not possible that in each case we were right the first time, and that our presumed awareness of how things are was not, in fact, veridical? Or even that we were wrong both times? (It was neither a coat, nor a piece of carpet, but a sleeping dog.) Further reflection along these lines seems to lead us to the conclusion that we can retract any particular judgement as to how things are; and if so, surely it is possible that all these particular, positive awarenesses may be faulty, and so possible also that there exist no actual items independent of experience. This objection has a long history, with a corresponding amount of criticism, but we need to be clear as to what exactly is wrong with it, as follows. The suggestion that any presumed awareness of how things are is merely an experience, itself uses the concept of experience. This concept is possible only by virtue of being 'semantically' linked with cases of experiential error, where how things are experienced as being differs from how they are and where how they are must be taken on its own terms, and as irreducible to terms of experience.

In respect of these cases, the (presumed) awareness of how things really are, must be taken at face value. It must be unquestioningly accepted as veridical. To question that awareness, in the light of the possibility of its being a non-veridical experience, would presuppose the availability of the concept we are trying to account for. When we have the concept of experience, we can go on to re-assess any particular (presumed) awareness of how things are. With any particular awareness, we can raise the possibility of its being merely a non-veridical experience. Empiricists philosophers, anxious for generalisation, are at this point prone to argue that, since nothing intrinsically marks off a particular awareness/experience as veridical or non-veridical, then perhaps they are all just experiences. Perhaps we need to suspend judgement on all claims about the objective world, which are embodied in awarenesses/experiences. Perhaps, they continue, there exists nothing other than this series of experiences. Perhaps no particular (presumed) awareness of how things are with items in the objective world is, in fact, veridical. We cannot allow the empiricist's move here. For if all awarenesses are to be re-assessed as merely experiences, so that none are to be accepted at face value, then we presuppose the availability of the concept of experience. But this concept presupposes, as a necessary condition of its possibility, a 'semantic' link with at least one case of experiential error, in which the (presumed) awareness of how things are is taken at face value. We can re-assess this particular awareness, as a non-veridical experience, as long as we can link the concept of experience to other cases in

which the (presumed) awareness of how things are, is taken at face value. If we try to suspend judgement on all such awarenesses at once, we remove the possibility of a 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and an extra-conceptual realm. We thereby deprive the concept of its very possibility - the concept cannot exist - and the term "experience" of its meaning. If this is right - that we can re-assess any particular (presumed) awareness of how things are, but not the whole lot at once - then to what are we committed?

We are not committed to the sanctity of the instance of experiential error in connection with which we first gain the concept of experience (if indeed there ever is one such instance). For even if I first grasped the concept of experience in connection with an awareness that what I thought was a rug was in fact a furry animal, I may later re-assess that awareness - it was not an animal, but a warm fur coat. What we are inescapably committed to, is the existence of at least one awareness, of how things positively are with independent items in an objective world, which is beyond question. We are thereby committed to the existence of such a world and such items, though not as yet to the truth of any particular claims about them. In later chapters, I will argue that we can go much further than this; but this in itself is sufficient to refute radical empiricism.

We have shown that the central empiricist concept, that of experience, is possible, - and so the central term of empiricist discourse, "experience", has its required meaning - only if there are items in an 'external world' which are essentially independent of experience. This refutes empiricist scepticism concerning the 'external world', in general, since such scepticism is possible only if false.



But this answer leads only to a further - though hopefully final - objection; a third test which will help us formulate the main argument of this chapter in relation to an older argument against empiricism.

### The Recursive Paradigm Case Argument

We can imagine the following response to our counter to the objection just raised. "Surely", it runs, "all this talk of a 'semantic' link with actual instances of experiential error amounts only to a revival of the old, discredited, Paradigm Case Argument". That is, we are illegitimately bridging a gap between meaning and existence. Just because certain paradigm cases, in relation to which the term "experience" has its meaning, must be conceived of as cases where an experience which is, intentionally, of independent items in an objective world is rejected on the basis of a positive awareness of how things really are, we are not entitled to conclude that such items, in such a reality, actually exist. For it will do just as well for the meaning of the term, if there just seem to be such cases of experiential error, involving the awareness of how things are in an objective world. We do not need the actual existence of these cases, and so do not need the actual existence of an inhabited objective world. What can we say to this objection?

Let us look at it from another angle. Consider the term "material object". We can accept that for a direct semantic link to hold, that with which it holds must be conceived of, or understood as a material object. But that does not license the

conclusion that such an object actually exists. It will be enough to establish the meaning of the term if it just seems as if there is a material object, if this is how things are experienced as being. Similarly with "experience": although we must understand the referent of an ostensive account of its meaning as related to an objective reality,<sup>43</sup> surely it will do as well if it only seems as if the experience is so related; if this is only how things are experienced as being rather than how they really are. But here we must dig in our heels. While we cannot bridge the gap between meaning and existence in the case of "material object", this is only because we presuppose that "experience" has its required meaning; so that experience of a certain kind, i.e. intentionally of material objects, provides an alternative to the actual existence of such objects sufficient to account for the meaningfulness of the term. Thus, the empiricist can argue, the fact that experience takes the form it does (with rule-governed regularities, in the Kantian mode), provides for the emergence of explicit concepts of particular kinds of material object, without presupposing the actual existence of material objects. By articulating the implicit general understanding of a material object, which is presupposed by those explicit concepts, we can arrive at the term "material object", without presupposing the actual existence of material objects. We can thus account for the meaningfulness of the term in question, while presupposing nothing more than the existence of a certain kind of experience. We have the meaning of the term, without the existence of the objects themselves.

This is the alternative which the radical empiricist proposes. With "experience" itself, however, the empiricist cannot adopt the same strategy. If we try to withdraw the commitment to the existence of an independent world in this way, we are caught in an infinite regress. For if the link which makes it possible for "experience" to have its required meaning, is with a situation in which how things are experienced as being, is at variance with a positive awareness of how things are with certain items independent of experience, then an empiricist counter is ruled out. If the empiricist tries to re-assess the commitment to a populated objective reality, this presupposes that the term "experience" already has its required meaning, and so is already linked with a 'paradigm case', in which a commitment to such a reality is already made. This commitment can be withdrawn, only if these presuppositions are already made at a prior stage, and so on. The regress is destructive, because it makes it impossible for the empiricist to give an account of the semantic links which make empiricism itself possible. Unless we stop the regress by accepting the commitment to an objective reality populated with independent items, we are left trying to use the term "experience", while severing the necessary conditions of its meaningfulness. The empiricist must therefore accept the presupposed commitment to a populated objective reality, as the price for being able to speak at all.

This discussion provides us with what may be a useful reformulation of the argument. What we have offered is, in fact, a recursive application of the paradigm-case argument, in the context of a reflection on the conditions of the possibility of empiricism itself. For while



the early paradigm-case theorists, as with the Kantian and Wittgensteinian thinkers already discussed, concerned themselves with the language or concepts through which experience was articulated, they could reach valid conclusions only about the structure of experience, how things must be experienced as being, or how they must seem. It is only when the empiricist premise, that there is experience, is not taken for granted, but rather investigated as to the conditions of its possibility, that we can bridge the gap between meaning and existence, by applying the arguments to the empiricist's own discourse.

If we can revive one of what Gellner calls the "pillars of linguistic philosophy", why not the other?<sup>44</sup> The Argument from Polar Opposites has been perhaps even less successful than the Paradigm Case Argument. Nevertheless, from the above discussion it can be seen that we have here precisely what one commentator sees as the only conditions under which the argument can succeed, namely a case where one of the polar opposites - the term "experience" - can have meaning only in relation to actual instance of the application of the other<sup>45</sup> the term "(populated) objective reality". In this kind of case it is impossible that only the first term has application, and so impossible that all there is, is experience.

### Recapitulation.

I would hardly think all this discussion to be worth the trouble, if it succeeded only in breathing life into an old argument or two. It is not these old arguments, however, but rather the thorough examination of the necessary conditions of

the possibility of radical empiricism, that has been important in these three chapters. In Chapter One, I criticised existing attempts to refute radical empiricism. In Chapter Two, I argued that the radical empiricist is committed to the use of a particular concept of experience. In Chapter Three, I argued that the necessary conditions of the possibility of that concept, and so of radical empiricism itself, include the falseness of the claim that there might exist nothing other than experience. Radical empiricism, I have argued, is therefore fundamentally incoherent, and so untenable. It is on the basis of this kind of argument (which has, almost parenthetically, refuted scepticism about the existence of the external world), that I feel we can move towards a foundation of ethics in the following chapters. I want to end this chapter with two questions. The first, I introduce like this. Let us accept that the argument so far has uncovered enough of the essentially necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, to enable us to show the basic incoherence of radical empiricism. Nevertheless, this still leaves open the question of how the concept of experience is possible. For if the argument of these chapters has not set out its own account of how this concept is possible, it might be thought that, no matter how compelling the argument has seemed to be, we need to be satisfied that some such account is possible. Can this be done? The argument to show that this can be done is important to the argument of the chapters to follow. I aim to provide it in the final section of this chapter.

The second question is also central to the argument that is to come. So far, if it has succeeded, the discussion has shown that radical

empiricism and its scepticism are untenable. But this has been very much an ad hominem argument, even if at a very general level, against empiricist scepticism. But how can this argument help us against other variants of scepticism, which are not based on empiricism? More generally, how can this argument serve as a starting-point from which to advance to a transcendental foundation of ethics. I want to discuss this latter question in the next chapter.

I wish then to conclude the present chapter with a section which deals to some extent with a certain uneasiness that might be felt about what has been presented so far. Suppose that it is accepted that radical empiricism is untenable, because its central concept is possible only if its major claims are false. Even so, I have not given any indication of how we can account for the concept of experience without already presupposing its availability. If no such account is possible, we might feel that the argument against radical empiricism, whatever its apparent cogency, diminishes in force. I now wish to point to an account of the possibility of the concept of experience which, as well as settling some of this increase, will help an understanding of the argument of Chapter Four.

#### But how is the concept of experience possible?

So far in this chapter, I have argued that the concept of experience requires for its possibility - and the term "experience" requires for its meaning - a 'semantic' link with instances of experiential error. But while we have thus uncovered some of the

essentially necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, there remain questions concerning how this concept is possible. Indeed, this is bound to be the case, since we have not attempted to provide sufficient conditions for the existence of the concept of experience. One question, however, seems especially awkward, although its answer gives rise to some interesting consequences. I have argued that the term "experience" gets its meaning, and the concept of experience is possible, only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with instances of experiential error. Further, I argued that this link requires a prior grasp, or understanding of such instances. Only on the basis of such a primary grasp of cases of experiential error, can the link be made with the concept of experience (as the concept of one aspect of the situation). But how can such a primary grasp of cases of experiential error - in relation to which the concepts of experience and reality are alone possible - itself be possible? And what form does this primary grasp take? These questions deserve at least something in reply. In this section I aim to provide a picture of how the concept of experience is possible. I believe that a set of non-circular sufficient conditions for its possibility cannot, in principle, be given. The picture I give is intended to be a non-circular account of the possibility of the concept of experience, which also comes close to our natural reflections on this issue. The argument will be this. I have already argued that the critical concept of experience is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with instances of experiential error. In this section, I will

argue that the primary understanding of such instances of error must be of them as totalities; rather than an understanding which is synthesised from the understanding of their components - how things are, and how they are experienced as being. I will then argue that a totality of experiential error can be primarily grasped only in relation to an 'outside' context, from which it is delimited, or marked off. This outside context is one of cognitive harmony, which the situation of experiential error fails to achieve. This delimitation, I will argue, cannot be a matter of an abstract comparison of two situations - cognitive harmony, and experiential error - but one of concrete breakdown in that harmony. Although I do not wish to take the argument further in connection with radical empiricism, part of the argument of Chapter Four will parallel the argument in this section, and pave the way for further developments. Let us address the problem.

The difficulty here arises from the fact that we cannot in the present context, offer our ordinary understanding of error as the primary one. For our ordinary understanding of cases of experiential error, is of cases where how things are, and how they are experienced as being, fail to match up; but this ordinary understanding employs the very concepts which the grasp of cases of experiential error is to help make possible. So despite the fact that our philosophical strategy has shown the need for a link with situations in which experience and reality are at odds, these cases of experiential error cannot be primarily understood in terms of experience failing to agree with reality. Here, the order of primary understandings reverses that of the stages in the philosophical strategy. But if the primary grasp of cases of error cannot employ these concepts, then how is such a grasp possible at all? From our vantage-point, as ordinary adults

who have gone through the process of acquiring the critical concepts of experience and reality, we can understand these cases as situations in which how things are experienced as being differs from how they really are. But this understanding clearly presupposes the availability of those concepts. How can there be a grasp of experiential error when the critical concepts of experience and reality are not available? How could a being without those concepts, have a grasp of experiential error?

Once possessed of the critical concept of experience, we can discuss instances of experiential error, as cases where one experience is rejected as non-veridical on the basis of another, which is presumed veridical. But such an account cannot, of course, help us uncover the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of experience. I will now look at another suggestion as to how we may account for the possibility of the critical concept of thought. I will argue that this suggestion is inadequate; but its failure will at least help us to recognise the severity of the problem that confronts us. The suggestion is this. Suppose that we take these experiences naively, as direct, perceptual contacts with reality. Then the question of whether these experiences in fact match up with reality, or are merely non-veridical experiences, has not been, and indeed cannot at that stage be, asked. We take them, as it were, at face value. Surely, it may be suggested, even at this naive stage, the conjunction of two 'naive' experiences, which from our vantage-point, can be seen to conflict with each other, must provoke the realisation that at least one of them must be non-veridical: That is, that at least one of these experiences must be merely an experience. Consider this example: Visiting a friend, I accept the offer of a cup of coffee. I reach for the china

cup. As I take it, I realise that the cup is furry, and drop it in shock. (My friend is a practical student of the Surrealists.) Now from our present vantage-point, possessing the critical concept of experience, we could consider this encounter in terms of two experiences: I. the visual experience, intentionally, of a china cup. II. the tactile experience, intentionally, of a furry cup. We could say that these experiences are in conflict with each other; and in the light of further experiences may rule one out as non-veridical, since it fails to fit into a coherent pattern with the other. But we have seen that such considerations are not available to us in an account of how the concept of experience is possible, since they presuppose the critical concept of experience which the grasp of a situation of experiential error was to make possible. Well, then, let us stick with our idea. Let us take these experiences in the naive manner, as unquestioned perceptual awarenesses of reality, so that the question of whether they match up with reality, or are aberrant experiences, has not, and cannot yet, be asked. There is then an awareness of a china cup, followed by an awareness that the cup is furry. Surely this succession of naive experiences, of unquestioned perceptual awarenesses, forces us into thinking that at least one of them must be wrong, in error? But this is not the case. For not only does this conjunction of naive awarenesses fail to force us to the concept of error, it is not possible for this conclusion to arise merely from that conjunction. For to move to the conclusion that here was a case of experiential error, there would have to be an understanding of the fact that the two naive awarenesses were in conflict, such that at least one of them was non-veridical. For the understanding of the experiences as

in mutual conflict amounts to this. If either experience is veridical, then the other cannot be - it must be a non-veridical experience. If how things are experienced as being is right in one case, it cannot be in the other. The understanding of the experiences as conflicting with each other therefore presupposes the critical concept of experience, and the concept of reality as that with which it may diverge. It cannot, then, be employed in the grasp of cases of experiential error which is to help make these concepts themselves possible. Whilst we, possessing the concepts of error, experience and reality, can judge that at least one of these experiences is in error, such a view is not available from the vantage-point of unquestioned acceptance of the two perceptual awarenesses themselves. Nothing in the mere juxtaposition of such experiences - which we can regard as conflicting with each other - can generate of itself the grasp of the situation as one of experiential error. Nothing here forces the concepts of error, experience or reality to emerge. We might note two supporting considerations here. First, it is notoriously the case that people can possess contradictory beliefs (though perhaps not if they are aware of the contradiction). Second, in reflecting on the relationship between the successive experiences, we could reach a different conclusion. There is nothing to prevent the conclusion that the cup was china, and the next moment turned to fur. An account of the experiences is thus available which does not even take them to be in mutual conflict, but allows for the veridicality of both.

If this is a correct assessment of the situation, then we seem to be stuck in a hopeless circle. The possibility of the critical



concepts of experience and reality depends on a 'semantic' link with instances of error, in which how things are experienced as being, and how they are, are interrelated aspects. But the understanding of experiential error which we have from our present vantage-point, requires the critical concept of experience, as that which may fail to match up with reality. This understanding of situations of error cannot, then, be the primary one: it cannot provide for the possibility of those concepts whose availability it already presupposes. Further, we have seen that the conjunction of experiences taken at a naive level, as perceptual awarenesses whose agreement with reality cannot at that stage be questioned, cannot of itself give rise to the primary grasp of a situation as one of experiential error. How can we escape from all this?

Let us take stock. It is clear that the primary grasp of experiential error cannot take the form of some sort of synthesis of the grasp of its components - that is, of how things are, and of how they are experienced as being - since the grasp of those components itself presupposes the primary grasp of error. But if the primary grasp of the situation of experiential error cannot be synthesised from the grasp of its components, then it must be a grasp of experiential error as a totality. That is, the situation of error cannot be primarily understood by putting together an understanding of its component parts. The only alternative is that it be understood as a whole. All that is meant by talk of this totality, is the total situation within which experience and reality are related. This relationship is one in which how things are experienced as being differs from how they really are. Having grasped such a totality, subsequent reflective analysis can distinguish, within

that totality, how things are experienced as being from how they really are. The grasp of experiential error as a totality must precede the conceptualisation of its internal components.<sup>46</sup> They can only be grasped on the basis of a prior grasp of the totality within which they are related.

Now this totality has a specific nature.  $I_t$  is not just any old totality, or even the totality of all that is.  $I_t$  must be a totality which can later be analysed as one within which experience and reality are at odds with each other. But how is a grasp of this totality possible?  $I_t$  cannot be grasped, in its specific nature, from the 'inside' - as a construction from, or synthesis of, its components - since this would presuppose the availability of the concepts which it is to make possible. But if it cannot be primarily grasped from the 'inside', then the situation of experiential error can only be grasped in its specific nature from 'outside'. But if the whole is to be a specific totality (rather than, say, the totality of all there is), then it must be marked off, or delimited, from that which is 'outside' it. If it were not so delimited, then - since it cannot be grasped from the 'inside' - there would be no way of grasping it as a whole, at all. The limit of the totality cannot be drawn from the 'inside'; it can only be drawn from without. Thus, the primary grasp, or understanding, of the totality of experiential error, must be of it in relation to a context from which it is delimited. We can continue the spatial metaphor in terms of drawing boundaries, to give some more flavour to the argument. Consider the two approaches here: we could, as it were, collect all the components required for the totality to be of the right kind, draw a boundary line round them, and then say

that the line delimits the totality. This corresponds to a grasp of a totality of experiential error on the basis of a grasp of its internal components. Or we could first draw the boundary to mark it off from another area, and say that the line delimits the totality, and that we can then start to look at its internal structure. This corresponds to a grasp of the totality of experiential error in relation to its delimitation from something outside it, with a consequent analysis of its interrelated components. My argument is that the first approach already presupposes the availability of the concepts it is to make possible. Only the second approach does not make that presupposition, and so only the second approach makes a grasp of experiential error (and so the concept of experience) possible. Let us take this approach further.

The way in which this totality is 'delimited from without' has to be such that the totality thus delimited is indeed one of experiential error (and not, for example, one of the failure to satisfy a desire). The totality thus delimited must be one which can be reflectively analysed as a case in which how things are experienced as being fails to match up with how they really are. This is the crucial point for critical empiricist philosophy. Some questions now arise. What sort of grasp of the totality of experiential error is possible? What is the character of this 'outside' from which a totality of experiential error is to be marked off, or delimited? How does this delimitation come about? If we tackle the first question, I hope the others will be answered en route.

What sort of grasp of this totality of experiential error is possible, given that the totality is in some sense delimited from

its 'outside'? In order to see what this question is getting at, and then to get an answer to it, let us look at some other examples of 'totalities', or 'wholes' with which we are acquainted. Our categorisation of items within the world distinguishes such things as people, trees, and societies. In possession of criteria of individuation carried by the appropriate sortal concept, we can scour the world for such entities; find them; and then study the relationships between their component parts. We can treat each of these entities as a totality, and discover how it maintains itself, performs certain functions, and so on. We have a grasp of the totality as something positive in itself, and more or less self-contained. This is not the sort of grasp we can have of a totality of experiential error. The primary grasp of experiential error cannot presuppose the concept of experiential error, since that concept itself presupposes the concepts of experience and reality which are at issue. But without the concept of experiential error, how can we come by a grasp of a totality of experiential error? How can we get a grip on a totality within which experience and reality are at odds? We know that such a grasp of this totality cannot be by means of a direct comparison between how things are, and how they are experienced as being, so as to uncover the difference. For such a comparison would already presuppose the availability of the concepts of experience and reality. It could not, then, play a part in an account of how those concepts are possible. There seems to be no way of grasping a totality of experiential error as a positive self-contained entity, delimited from the outside world without presupposing such a grasp of its components as we cannot at this stage allow ourselves. But what is the alternative to all this? What could we mean by grasping the totality of experiential error in a negative manner? To clarify the point at issue, consider first an analogy.

Take, as analogous to the situation of experiential error, the case of an inadequate carburettor. The situation here is one where the carburettor in a car cannot do its job. What sort of grasp of this total situation can we have? Look at the alternatives. First: we could analyse the component parts of the carburettor, and realise that the size of the holes (or whatever else goes on inside a carburettor) will not match up to the amount of petrol required for the engine to work correctly. Our grasp of the totality (the inadequacy of the carburettor) is achieved by synthesising our grasp of its component parts and their interrelationships. It is a grasp of that totality from the 'inside'. It is worth pointing out that this synthesis of our understanding of the components cannot of itself give us a grasp of the inadequacy of the carburettor. All we have is a direct comparison between the amount of petrol that a particular carburettor will let through, and the amount of petrol required for a particular engine to function in a particular manner. That comparison does not in itself show the carburettor to be inadequate (it might be perfectly satisfactory in a different car). We can only grasp it as inadequate in relation to the smooth functioning of the rest of the car. We cannot, then, have a positive grasp of the totality as an entity in its own right (like trees, or people). Mechanical failure is not an entity in itself, but refers us essentially to a wider functional context in which it can be grasped as a failure.

Second: we are driving along when the car slows of its own accord to a stop. The car engine fails to work properly. We trace the problem to a lack of sufficient petrol entering the cylinders. We

then discover that the flow of petrol from the tank up to the carburettor is sufficient. Our conclusion is then that the carburettor is inadequate: it cannot do its job. We can then take it to pieces and find out why. In this case, our grasp of the totality at issue is achieved, not by a positive synthesis of our grasp of its component parts, but through delimiting that totality in relation to a wider context - an 'outside'. Here, the carburettor's inadequacy is grasped in relation to that outside context: it is a failure to achieve a certain mechanical harmony with other parts of the car, which leads to a mechanical breakdown.

Let us now look again at the totality of experiential error. What sort of grasp of this totality can we have? Corresponding to the first alternative in the case of the carburettor, is the grasp of experiential error from the 'inside'. That is, the totality is grasped by means of a synthesis of our understanding of its component parts - how things are, and how they are experienced as being - and their interrelationships. This approach we have rejected, as already presupposing the concepts it is to help make possible. What corresponds to the second approach taken to the problem of the carburettor? Playing football, the ball vanishes into some long grass. Chasing after it, I see the ball and deliver a huge kick. My foot explodes with pain on contact with what is, in fact, the top of a derelict, stone, gatepost. The problem in the smooth running of my life is traced to a cognitive failure (not, for example, to the weakness of my foot). Reflective analysis uncovers the components of this failure (it looked like the ball, but was in fact made of stone). Here, the totality of experiential error is grasped in its relationship with a wider context: it is a failure to achieve a certain cognitive harmony which leads to a disruption in my active life.

So far, we have two analogous stories. What we need now is to sharpen our understanding of how the second story helps answer the questions about our grasp of the totality of experiential error. Let me try to clarify the issue. We have already rejected the first approach towards understanding the total situation of experiential error - understanding it by means of a synthesis of an understanding of its components. But let us look at a further difficulty with this approach. This approach consists, essentially, in seeing how things are, and comparing it with how things are experienced as being. If we do this, however, all we get is a comparison between the intentional structure of an experience and, as it were, the structure of reality. The comparison highlights a difference between the two. But even if we help ourselves illegitimately to the concepts of experience and reality required for such a comparison, the comparison of how things are with how things are experienced as being leaves out an essential feature of experiential error. This is the idea that the divergence between experience and reality constitutes a cognitive failure. For it is precisely this concern with the possibility of cognitive failure, which is central to the critical empiricist interrogation of naive realism. For this interrogation implies a critique of knowledge, rather than reality. The lack of fit between experience and reality is construed as a failure in the experience to match the reality. (Compare the way in which a lack of fit between a moral imperative and reality is construed as a failure of reality to match up with our ideals. It is reality which is being questioned.) This sense of failure could not be generated by a mere comparison of two structures, even if we allowed ourselves the concepts of experience and reality. Now if we were to add the idea that, implicit in the

experience, is a claim that this is how things really are, then it might seem that we would have the required understanding of experiential error as a failure. But that understanding would nevertheless already presuppose the concepts of experience and reality, and could not help us with an account of the possibility of those concepts. The consideration of the first approach highlights the difficulty of accounting for the primary grasp of the totality of experiential error. How can the second approach towards grasping that totality - understanding experiential error in the light of its place in a wider context - help us to cope with this difficulty?

In this way: The totality of experiential error delimited from outside, must be a totality which can subsequently be analysed as a failure of experience to match up with reality. How can this failure be grasped? It can be primarily grasped only through reference to that which it fails to achieve, namely, a cognitive harmony. We cannot primarily grasp experiential error as a positive, more or less self-contained entity (like people, trees and societies), because the grasp of it as a failure refers us essentially to that which it fails to achieve. It fails to achieve cognitive harmony. The primary grasp of the totality of experiential error can, then, only be achieved through the negative delimitation of that totality from an 'outside' context of cognitive harmony. Although this second approach allows room for the primary grasp of experiential error as a failure to achieve cognitive harmony, it may seem unsatisfying. Although it aims to provide a grasp of the totality of experiential error from outside, without presupposing the concepts of experience and reality, it seems only to shift the burden to the notion of cognitive harmony. To arrive at a satisfactory picture



of how the concept of experience is possible, we need, then, to consider a further point.

The further point concerns the availability of this notion of a cognitive harmony between how things are, and how they are experienced as being. So far, I have argued that the totality of experiential error must primarily be grasped from the 'outside': that is, in virtue of its negative relationship with a wider context - its failure to keep up a cognitive harmony. It has already been argued that this grasp of experiential error is in turn a necessary condition of the possibility of the concept of experience. Now the notion of experiential error available to possessors of the concepts of experience and reality, is of cases where how things are is at variance with how they are experienced as being. Similarly, the notion of cognitive harmony here, amounts to that of a coincidence of how things are with how they are experienced as being. It follows that the delimitation of experiential error from the context of cognitive harmony is logically prior to the availability of the notion of a cognitive harmony. Prior to that delimitation, that cognitive harmony is unquestioned and unquestionable: for to question it would require just those critical concepts of experience and reality which are at that stage unavailable.<sup>47</sup> If this point is taken, then a certain exasperation may emerge. How on earth does this supposed delimitation of the totality of experiential error, from a context of cognitive harmony, happen?

In answering this question, we need to see more clearly what the difficulty is. Let us see this in relation to what might seem a fairly obvious reply to the question. This would be the suggestion that experiential error is marked off from cognitive

harmony by virtue of a comparison of the two situations: on the one side, how things are experienced as being accords with how they are; on the other side, it does not. But of course such a comparison would presuppose the availability of the concepts of experience and reality which it is supposed to help make possible. We must reject this suggestion. But if we cannot legitimately employ these concepts in delimiting experiential error from its 'outside' context, then what alternative can there be? For no other concepts could do this job. The only alternative is this: the delimitation, from the context of cognitive harmony, which makes possible the primary grasp of experiential error must be non-conceptual. For any conceptual grasp of the relation between error and harmony presupposes the availability of the very concepts at issue. Thus what we have here, can be no abstract conceptual marking off of the one from the other. But how are we to make sense of the notion of a non-conceptual grasp of experiential error in its negative relationship with cognitive harmony?

Let us look at the situation again. The totality of experiential error cannot be primarily grasped from within, but only from 'outside', in relation to a context of cognitive harmony which it fails to achieve. But the grasp of this relationship, between error and harmony, cannot take the form of understanding the case of error as a failure to live up to an abstract ideal of cognitive harmony, which we already have in mind. To understand the relationship as one in which the actual case fails to live up to the ideal, would require that the ideal was already conceived in terms of how things are, coinciding with how they are experienced as being - which presuppose the concepts of experience and reality at issue. The total situation of experiential error

cannot be delimited from the context of cognitive harmony in any abstract manner which requires the concepts we are trying to account for. That delimitation of experiential error from cognitive harmony can only take the concrete form of an actual rupture in that harmony. Or, taking a cue from the previous analogy, it can only take the form of a breakdown in cognitive harmony.<sup>48</sup> The relationship between experiential error and cognitive harmony is the relationship of error to that in which it constitutes a rupture, or breakdown. It is this delimitation of the totality of experiential error from its 'outside', which makes possible the primary grasp of that totality. The fact that this delimitation of experiential error, as a rupture in cognitive harmony, is not an abstract relationship but a concrete breakdown, makes possible a non-conceptual grasp of the totality of experiential error. Let us illustrate this with the case of the furry cup.

When the cup is first offered, no question as to the veracity of the perceptual experience of the cup as an ordinary china one is raised. Indeed, if this were prior to the emergence of the critical concept of experience, the question could not be raised. When I touch the cup, the shock on feeling the furry surface leads me to drop it. Here, the feeling of shock is the non-conceptual registration<sup>49</sup> of a cognitive rupture, of the breakdown of an unquestioned perceptual relation with reality, into experiential error. Reflection on this breakdown can give rise to its analysis in terms of a failure of experience to match up with reality, and thence of the breakdown as a breakdown of cognitive harmony:

nevertheless, it is only the non-conceptual grasp, or registration, of this relationship between cognitive harmony and experiential error, which makes the critical concepts of experience and reality at all possible. A further point is worth making here. If a non-conceptual registration of breakdown in cognitive harmony is to be possible, then that cognitive harmony must have a non-conceptual aspect. If that harmony consisted merely in an abstract coincidence of how things are, with the abstract content of a claim implicit in experience, then the breakdown in that abstract relationship could only be registered conceptually. The non-conceptual aspect of that harmonious relationship can be provided for by its practical significance: the unquestioned harmony of experience and reality informs practical life. Thus in the examples of experiential error introduced earlier, it is the fact that how things are experienced as being informs our practical involvement with reality, which provides the basis for a non-conceptual registration of the breakdown in that unquestioned cognitive harmony.

This provides us with an idea of how the 'semantic' link between the concept of experience and cases of experiential error is possible. It is not that a concept (or its linguistic expression) is somehow brought along and put in contact with such a case. Rather, the concepts are the way in which the non-conceptual registration of a breakdown in cognitive harmony gets articulated. Their relationship with instances of experiential error is thus more intimate than the current theories of semantics tend to suggest.<sup>50</sup>

To conclude this section, I should like to make a point about temporality. I will argue that the process of rejecting how things are experienced as being, on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things are, is necessarily a temporal one (at least, insofar as the primary grasp of experiential error is concerned). Let me introduce the argument like this. I have spoken in this section of a disruption in the non-conceptual involvement of how things are experienced as being, which provides the basis for a non-conceptual registration of the fact that an unquestioned cognitive harmony has broken down. Thus the sudden interruption in my game of football, was the occasion for a non-conceptual registration of the fact that the unquestioned harmony between my experience of the object before me and its reality had broken down. It was not a football, but a piece of stone. I have also spoken of the rejection of how things are experienced as being, on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things are. I have argued that this rejection cannot come about as the outcome of an abstract comparison between how things are experienced as being, and how they are, since this would require the very concepts which are at issue here. The primary grasp of having fallen into experiential error, must be a non-conceptual one. We are now in a position to recognise certain implications regarding temporality.

The implications are as follows. If how things are experienced as being were co-temporaneous with the (presumed) awareness of how things are, on the basis of which the experience is rejected as non-veridical; then that rejection could only be the result of

an abstract comparison between the two, checking off experience against reality. There could not be the required non-conceptual grasp of the fact that how things are experienced as being differs from how they are, only a comparison which requires the very concepts at issue here. For a non-conceptual grasp of experiential error to be possible, the delimitation of experiential error from an unquestioned cognitive harmony must have a temporal character. Something like the following must be involved. To begin with, there is an unquestioned presupposition of harmony between experience and reality. This unquestioned harmony then breaks down in the face of a new (presumed) awareness of how things are (the ball is solid, the cup made of fur). The non-conceptual registration of this breakdown (a certain feeling of shock) makes room for a recognition that how things were experienced as being is not how things really are. The (presumed) awareness of how things really are, temporally displaces how things are experienced as being. If this were not the case, if there were not this temporal heterogeneity, then there could be no non-conceptual registration of the unquestioned harmony between experience and reality having broken down. There would be only the possibility of abstractly comparing experience side by side with reality; a process which would itself require the critical concepts of experience and reality, and so cannot form part of an account of their possibility. Whenever the non-conceptual registration of a concrete rupture in an unquestioned harmony is required, temporality is essentially involved.

This argument allows us to say something more about the relationship between logical and genetic priorities in this chapter. So far I have

argued that the logical priorities at least set limits on the genetic possibilities. If concept A logically presupposes concept B, then concept A cannot be acquired before concept B. We can now see that the position is more complex. For the concept of experience is possibly only as an outcome of a temporal process, which results in the non-conceptual registration of the fact that cognitive harmony has broken down into experiential error. This registration requires a (presumed) awareness of how things are ("The cup is furry"), which cannot be merely co-temporaneous with how things are experienced as being, but which must temporally displace experience. The primary grasp of experiential error is consequently a grasp of how things were experienced as being, as not matching up to how things really are. This has repercussions for what has been termed "the metaphysics of presence".<sup>51</sup> For the primary grasp of experience is not of it as something given as immediately present, but rather as something which is temporally displaced from the present, by a (presumed) awareness of how things really are. What some philosophers have done in the past, is to forget, or fail to uncover, the necessary temporal process which results in their possession of the critical concept of experience; and then to flatten out the temporal structure of that process, so that experience is understood as that which is given - this, here, now - even if the existence of the external world can be questioned. But I do not have the space to pursue these reflections on the history of philosophy. Here, I restrict myself to pointing out the necessary temporal character of a concrete rupture in cognitive harmony.

I hope to have given in this section some idea of the conditions in which the concept of experience is actually possible. There is much more to be said, of course, and some of this will emerge in later chapters. In Chapter Four, I hope to take up issues which go beyond radical empiricism to critical philosophy in general.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### BEGINNING PHILOSOPHY

#### Search for a Starting Point in Philosophy

The argument of the previous chapters has been that empiricist scepticism is incoherent. The central term of its discourse, "experience", can have its required meaning only if there exists an 'external world' containing items whose existence and characteristics are independent of experience. (Correlatively, the concept of experience is possible only on this condition.) Radical empiricism is meaningful only if false. In this chapter I wish to take up the question of whether, if radical empiricism fails to fill the role, there can be any other starting-point in philosophy. I will look at some of the candidates for the post. This discussion will lead on to an investigation of the parallel discussion of the guiding interest of critical empiricist philosophy; this investigation will uncover some of the essential features of the concept of thought which lies at the heart of that inquiry. I aim to show that this provides us with an unchallengeable starting-point for philosophy. In an argument which parallels the refutation of radical empiricism in Chapter Three, I will go on to claim that, by uncovering the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought, we can show that any general scepticism about the existence of an objective world must be incoherent.

If the argument of Chapter Three is successful, it rules out radical empiricism as a coherent philosophy. But it is not clear what should happen next. There are many avenues open to philosophers disenchanted with radical empiricism as a comprehensive philosophical

outlook. The 'commonsensical' realism of G.E. Moore, the description of language-games by Wittgenstein, the 'naturalised' epistemology of Quine, the abandonment of epistemology by Rorty, are evidence enough of the variety here. But if we put a limit on the critical aspirations of radical empiricism - ruling out empiricist scepticism about the existence of an 'external world' - we should consider its more positive aspect. Many empiricists have coupled the negative, critical element of empiricism, with a positive focus on experience as the foundation of our ordinary beliefs and scientific theories. To what extent does the refutation of radical empiricism entail a rejection of this attempt to provide a secure beginning for our philosophies? Let us first note that this form of foundationalism derives originally from a kind of naive irritation. It accepts that what we take for positive knowledge of the world can be mistaken. It then wants to argue that even if we are forever denied our epistemological innocence, we can at least establish something positive, if only concerning how things are experienced as being, and try to build on that. Here, this foundationalism argues, we have a secure, indubitable foundation for further deliberation. Now I have already argued, in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> that the critical function of radical empiricism does not require this notion of experience as something to which we have infallible and absolute access. We have also seen that the concentration on experience leads to increasingly sophisticated accounts of its nature and structure, and of the kind of justification which experience can provide for our ordinary and our scientific beliefs. This sophistication is achieved at the cost of a failure

to reflect adequately on the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical, interrogative, empiricist project. Such reflection, undertaken in the last two chapters, showed that the radical empiricist's claim - that there exists, perhaps, nothing other than experience - is incoherent. I now want to consider more closely the claim of many empiricists that experience provides us with a positive indubitable starting-point for philosophy.

How is experience supposed to do this? It is claimed that pure experience, with regard to its nature and its existence, provides us with apodictic evidence, brooking no doubt.<sup>2</sup> This supposed indubitability then seems to mark the suitability of reflection on experience as the place at which to begin philosophy. This is true not only for philosophers who have tried to construct our ordinary view of the world on this basis, but also for those interested in giving transcendental arguments to establish the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience.<sup>3</sup> But such a positive beginning brings with it the problem of its own justification. For how can we justify the claim that our reports of pure experience are indubitable? How can we be certain that we can be certain here? Such questions were asked of Descartes, and are still asked of empiricists such as Ayer.<sup>4</sup> The difficulty with answering these questions is that no answer can be accepted which depends on the proposed starting-point. Such an answer would presuppose the starting-point, and so could not serve to justify it. Nor can they be given prior to the starting-point, preparing the way for its acceptance: we would then have a new starting-point whose own validity would be questioned. What can we say in the face of such a dilemma?

Let us look at what happens if one argues against the apodicticity of immediate reflection on pure experience.

Take an example: suppose that I have an experience, intentionally, of a cup. I can now try to set this experience up in a phenomenological 'seeing', so that the experience is given immediately and indubitably to this awareness.<sup>5</sup> Now it seems to me that when I do this, the phenomenological awareness temporally succeeds the experience of which it is an awareness. There is the experience of the cup, and then the awareness of that experience. But when the experience itself becomes an object of consciousness, it seems to displace the previous object of consciousness - the cup - so that while I attend to the experience, I no longer actually have that experience. It is just past, not immediately present to the phenomenological gaze. If this is so, then it would seem to introduce some reliance on memory into any report of the experience, so that the apodeictic quality of such a report is removed. Without immediacy, indubitability seems to go too. Now although things do in fact seem to me to be as described above, my concern is not here to defend this view against what we may call the thesis of immediacy of experience.<sup>6</sup> I want instead to see what kind of reply the empiricist can make to it. And it is clear that, faced with such opposition, all we get from the empiricist is a dogmatic re-assertion of the case.<sup>7</sup> Things are like this, we are told, and, while we may be helped and encouraged to see them likewise, if we do not, rational discussion is at an end. Ultimately, any philosophy which begins by claiming an immediate positive awareness is dogmatic: it cannot justify its claim to indubitability, only re-assert it more vigorously.

It would be wrong to think that this conclusion would necessarily discountenance all empiricists, or those transcendental arguers who begin from the same place. Empiricists may either accept that dogmatism is inevitable at this stage, or give other reasons for focussing on experience despite its possible fallibility. Proponents of transcendental arguments, even if accepting the fallibility of first-person reports on experience, will find it almost unthinkable that anyone should doubt the actual existence of experience, and will claim that this is all that is required for arguments as to the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience to get a hold.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, there has been sufficient interest in achieving an absolutely unchallengeable starting-point, for philosophers to pursue a different train of thought. If there is no way of ensuring that a positive starting-point for philosophy is beyond doubt, and if there are no certain means of convincing someone that they should adopt it, then it has seemed that some kind of ad hominem argument is in order. That is, a philosophical position can be defended against an objection by arguing that the objection itself in some way presupposes the truth of that to which it objects. Indeed a frequent tactic in philosophy has been to appeal to an immediate positive awareness, say of experience, and then throw in ad hominem arguments against any objections which then arise. But, deprived of a positive starting-point, can ad hominem arguments themselves provide us with a starting-point in philosophy? Is their use not limited to countering that finite number of particular

objections which in fact arise from an infinitude of possibilities? These questions direct us to the goal of finding a starting-point such that all doubt or denial of that starting-point is ruled out, since it in some way presupposes the truth of that starting-point itself. If we can discover it, such a starting-point will be self-protecting. It will be self-protecting in the sense that any proposed doubt or denial of the starting-point will be self-defeating - presupposing the truth of that which they aim to question. A general ad hominem argument must show this to be the case.

#### Candidates for the starting-point

Let us look at some of the candidates. Perhaps the most familiar is "I exist". Does an objection to this claim presuppose its truth? It has often been thought so, on the grounds that for someone to think "Perhaps I do not exist", they must themselves exist. "I do not exist" can never be true, and so we seem to have an unchallengeable self-protecting starting-point. But to those mindful of the criticism made of the Cartesian cogito by Russell, this will seem too quick.<sup>9</sup> This criticism, that the "I" in Descartes' "I think" was merely a grammatical convenience carrying no substantive implications, brings out the possibility of consistently doubting whether "I exist" is true. For such a doubt, or the denial that "I exist" is true, can be based on the idea that a thought does not require a thinker. If there can be a thought without a thinker, then the doubt whether the statement "I exist" is true, need not presuppose the truth of that statement. Unless we can show that doubts or objections presuppose the existence

of doubters and objectors, it seems therefore possible for there to be a consistent objection to "I exist". Perhaps we can show this, but the argument threatens to be long and involved. Let us look at another possible starting-point.

What about "There is experience"? We have noted already the problems in positively establishing this claim, by means of the immediate awareness of experience. But we also noted a suggestion that proponents of transcendental arguments, concerning the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience, would consider any objection to the claim incoherent. Will this suggestion provide us with a general ad hominem argument? Is not, for example, any doubt or denial that there is experience itself necessarily an experience, so that objections presuppose the truth of that to which they object? If it were the case that an objection or doubt were necessarily an experiential occurrence, then this would indeed be so. But, especially over the last century, philosophers have fastened on to the abstract nature of the content of thought, as being neither a material nor an experiential entity, but as belonging to some quasi-Platonic 'third world'.<sup>10</sup> In the light of such developments, it seems a possible option to say that the doubt that there is experience can exist, in its abstract, atemporal sort of way, without necessarily involving the existence of an experience, or any kind of 'doubt-event'. Perhaps here, too, an argument can be found to show that doubts, denials and so on must indeed be experiential occurrences; or that they presuppose the existence of experience in some other manner. But again the way ahead looks univiting.

"There is language". Surely this is unquestionable. Its being written testifies, of itself, to its truth, and any objection to it surely presupposes the existence of the language in which it is expressed. Let us be careful here. Again, philosophers of a Platonist inclination appear to have entertained the possibility of thought existing in abstraction from its linguistic expression. How much sense can we make of this? Not surprisingly, such a notion is generally introduced in relation to language. Thus Frege, without defining 'thought' suggests that a thought is the sense of a sentence.<sup>11</sup> Further, we can only grasp the thought in language.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the thought itself seems, for Frege, to be independent of language. It seems that thoughts can exist independently of language, and indeed pre-date it.<sup>13</sup> Now we can understand some of the reasons for holding this notion. It seems that in translating a sentence from one language to another, we express the 'same thing' in different languages. We can even express the 'same thing' in different ways within a single language. Such considerations seem to lead us to the idea of thought in abstraction from any linguistic expression, as waiting naked somewhere to be clothed in order that we may apprehend it.<sup>14</sup> Such total abstraction now seems suspicious to many philosophers. It leaves us with the problem of trying to understand, without reference to its linguistic expression, or its 'embodiment' in any 'thought-event', what a thought can be. For what is left of this notion of thought? Having abstracted from its sensible and temporal characteristics, all we can have is the idea of 'entities' which 'inhabit' a non-temporal,



non-sensible 'realm', and which can be non-sensibly 'grasped' or 'intuited'. It may seem here that unless this notion of thought is understood as an abstraction (and so as presupposing the existence of that, especially its linguistic expression, from which it is abstracted), the terms in scare-quotes are entirely unanchored metaphors. They may well give us no notion at all.

In advance of a detailed argument to this effect, we must at least respect the Platonic, Fregean notion of a thought. In that case, it is possible that the thought (though not, of course, the statement) that there is language, is false. It is possible that there are only abstract thoughts in a Platonic 'third realm'. The doubt that there is language is not obviously self-defeating. It does not obviously presuppose the truth of that which it doubts, since that doubt can exist as an abstract thought-content, devoid of linguistic clothing. Let us look elsewhere for our starting-point.

The identity of the final candidate is perhaps clear. For any objection to any claim must at the very least be itself a thought, or judgement.<sup>15</sup> It must at least be the thought or judgement that, for example, perhaps there is no material world.

The starting-point that will satisfy us looks to be, then, "There are thoughts". "Thought" here must be understood in the sense of an abstract Platonic thought-content. It must be a 'third realm' entity, in abstraction from any linguistic expression, thought-event, or thinker. Any objection, doubt or denial concerning this claim must itself be a thought, and so presuppose

the truth of the starting-point. It is immune from revision, since any revision presupposes its truth. The generality of the ad hominem argument thus guarantees the unassailability of this philosophical beginning. But where can we go from here?

Consider further the nature of this proposed starting-point. Although not a logically necessary truth, it cannot consistently be doubted, since the existence of any doubt itself presupposes its truth. It is thus fully self-protecting, and is indeed self-guaranteeing in the sense that it is itself a thought, and so adequate evidence of its own truth. But granted its unchallengeability, it is a very meagre sort of beginning: what can we hope to gain from it? It has been thought that arguments starting from such general beginnings must result in conclusions either trivial or suspect.<sup>16</sup> Before discussing a deeper objection to the starting-point so far entertained, I will try to give some idea of how such an argument might proceed. As well as showing that we can get at least somewhere from our miserable beginning, we shall also encounter the grounds of the deeper objection.

#### A Possible Argument

An argument might go like this. Notwithstanding the abstract conception of thought used in the proposed starting-point, it is at least clear that any thought must be about something or other. Unless a doubt is about something, so that it has what we can call a content,<sup>17</sup> it can hardly pose a problem for any knowledge-claim. We can be a little more specific here. There must be at least some thoughts which concern things other than thought itself. To

take a particular example, there could not just be a self-thinking, or self-reflexive thought such as "This is a thought". For this supposed thought has no content. If we ask what "This" refers to, we are told that it refers to this thought, i.e. the thought that this is a thought. If we ask for the content of the thought, what thought this is, we can only be told that it is this thought itself. And so on. We are caught in a process of eternal self-reference which can never succeed in determining a content for the thought. And if such an immediately self-reflexive thought has no determinable content, if it sets us off merely on an infinite process of deferral, then it fails to be a thought at all.

More generally, there cannot only be thoughts, such as the proposed starting-point itself, which concern only thoughts. For the concept of thought would not, under such conditions, be possible. If the concept we have expressed by the term "thought" is to be possible, it must be 'semantically' linked with something other than itself (or the term will not possess its meaning, and the concept will be vacuous, i.e., no concept at all)<sup>18</sup>. Ultimately, this will require examples of thoughts which instantiate the concept. Now if these examples themselves employ the concept of thought, then the task just begins again; since the question of the link between the concept of thought and that extra-conceptual realm which makes it possible, would have already been begged. Such a link can be established only if there are at least some thoughts which do not themselves use the concept of thought. Nor, to pursue this further, can the concepts in terms of which these thoughts are articulated,

themselves involve any intrinsic reference to thoughts, or be in any way reducible to the concept of thought. For this would again effectively remove a necessary condition of the possibility of the concept of thought. These concepts must instead be of items which are in this sense independent of thought; that is, whose existence and operations cannot be understood in, or reduced to, terms of thought. These are our everyday concepts; concepts of things like cats, cabbages and kings.

Let us take this a little further. So far the argument has been that a necessary condition of the possibility of the concept of thought, and hence of the proposed starting-point itself, is the existence of at least some thoughts about things which are essentially independent of thought. Now if the concepts in which such thoughts are articulated are themselves to be possible (and so their linguistic expressions meaningful), then there must, as I argued before, be some 'semantic' link between them and an extra-conceptual realm.<sup>19</sup> The nature of this link must be such that items in this realm are subsumed under the concepts articulating the salient thoughts. It seems, then, that such thought-independent items must exist, as a necessary condition of the possibility of our proposed starting-point. Here, though, we can expect a familiar objection. For it need not be the case that there actually exist such items, as long as there seem to be such items.<sup>20</sup> If there is experience, intentionally, of such items, this will provide content for the salient concepts, without entailing the actual existence of the items which are

subsumed under them. The thought that these items actually exist may be false. Room will be left for the claim that all there is, is experience, and no 'external world' at all. I hope to have already shown that such a position is not coherent.<sup>21</sup> But instead of taking this envisaged argument about the necessary conditions of the starting-point proposed above any further, I want to consider a deeper objection to that starting-point, partly in the light of the possibility of the kind of sceptical challenge we have just seen. "There are thoughts". This was presented as an absolutely unchallengeable, self-guaranteeing, truth. It was also argued that we may even be able to get somewhere, by investigating the necessary conditions of its possibility. What objection could there possibly be? The objection I wish to develop is that, in a very important sense, this is no starting-point at all.

### Beginning with Hegel

As an approach to the issue of whether the thought "There are thoughts" can be properly adopted as a starting-point for philosophy, consider the following points.

First: the concept of thought employed above was actually obtained only as a result of a fairly lengthy process, involving successive abstractions from our ordinary notion of thought. Perhaps, then, we should take for our starting-point the beginning of that process, as a necessary condition of the emergence of that concept? But it is not clear that this process is a necessary condition, rather than merely a de facto precursor, of that emergence.

It will not be easy, if possible at all, to overcome the feeling that, given the existence of the concept, nothing about the necessity of the process by which it, in fact, emerged, can be validly concluded. Still, this leads us to a deeper question. For the movement of discussion which resulted in the proposed starting-point was generated by consideration of the essential features of a doubt. Could there be a doubt without a doubter? Without the occurrence of an actual doubt-event? And so on.<sup>22</sup> Should we not then take up the question of why this should be the moving consideration. This will in turn mean taking up the question of the interest which underlies the search for an absolute starting-point, and which guides all critical philosophical questioning. Hegel raises the issue thus:

If the fear of falling into error sets up a mistrust of Science, which in the absence of such scruples gets on with the work itself, and actually cognizes something, it is hard to see why we should not turn round and mistrust this very mistrust. Should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself? Indeed, this fear takes something - a great deal in fact - for granted.<sup>23</sup>

Critical philosophy does not erupt, fully formed and presuppositionless, from nowhere. The critical questioning of knowledge-claims, and the consequent quest for an unchallengeable starting-point, are guided by an interest in true thought, in the light of the possibility of false thought. Perhaps philosophy should begin with reflection on this interest, and on the necessary conditions of its possibility?

Before attempting an answer to this, let us briefly recall what happens when such reflection is lacking. We saw earlier how Strawson's failure to investigate the nature of the interest which governs his choice of a concept of experience, not only makes that choice appear relatively arbitrary, but also prevents him from seeing that a major strand of his argument in *The Bounds of Sense* is in fact pre-empted by such reflection.<sup>24</sup> More surprisingly, perhaps, in view of his work on Hegel, the same lack of reflection results in a similar dogmatism concerning the concept of experience in the writing of Charles Taylor. He takes the structure of transcendental arguments to be such that the first step amounts to an uncritical assertion concerning the concept of experience: "We just see that experience must be of something to be experience".<sup>25</sup> But by what right are, say, joy or boredom, which are not obviously of something (in the sense Taylor intends here) to be ruled out? What justifies the use of this concept of experience? Of course, I do not here wish to deny that experience is, even necessarily, of something. I want instead to show that in order to see what counts, and what does not count, as an experience, we need to know the point of the concept, the role it is to play. Only in this way can we understand its limits (determined by its role), and so get a grip on the concept, the necessary conditions of whose possibility, we are to investigate.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to the question of a reflection on the interest which guides critical philosophical questioning, we have seen reason to link this question with that of the central concepts

at work in such questioning. That guiding interest determines the role the salient concepts are to play. This in turn provides a basis for judgements about what those concepts must be, in order to play that role. What implications can we discover in the present case? All critical philosophical questioning, it was suggested, is guided by an interest in truth, in the light of the possibility of falsity. How much are we to make of this, and how is it related to the central concepts of philosophical inquiry? Are we to deal with it directly, for example, as an active interest of human beings in social interaction? This would be to move too quickly, and to presuppose too much. What we can say, is that any doubt, or critical question of a knowledge-claim, raises, in connection with a particular thought, the possibility of thought being false. This notion, of thought as possibly false, or as possibly differing from how things are, is essential. Without it, a doubt would not be a doubt; there could be no questioning of knowledge-claims. Such claims could only be accepted at face-value. Critical philosophy would not be possible.

This point is clearly related to that made earlier with regard to the concept of experience required for empiricist critical philosophy to be possible.<sup>27</sup> Why should we now concern ourselves with the concept of thought, rather than experience? First, it will be useful to note briefly some of the reasons why critical philosophy has so often centred on the concept of experience, rather than that of thought; especially, in view of the fact that it is the thought, or judgement, implicit in experience which



enables the concept of experience to play its role in the critical empiricist's philosophical strategy. We can mention, for example, the traditional focus on the senses as a primary source of knowledge; the important role of observation in science; and the fact that an important role in the genesis of the concept of thought is, in fact, played by reflection on experiential error (though it is not here my concern to argue that this is necessarily the case). But perhaps the most important reason in the present context is the fact that the concept of experience plays a dual role in the critical empiricist strategy. First; it provides, by virtue of the thought or judgement implicit in it, an epistemological alternative to what is often called naive realism: rather than accept the claim that X, we can offer, as an alternative, the possibility that it merely seemed that X. Second: a bare denial, or doubt, of the truth of a claim cannot provide an account of the possibility of that claim with regard to its meaningfulness. If the empiricist wants at least to suspend judgement as to the existence of that ordinary world that our thought and discourse generally takes for granted, then she needs to provide an alternative account of what it is in relation with which such discourse has meaning.<sup>28</sup> Experience then plays its second role of providing an extra-conceptual realm which will give 'content' to thoughts, and hence enable them to be thoughts at all.

Although such considerations may give us an idea of why the concept of experience has been so important in modern philosophy, there are good reasons for us to focus on the concept of thought (as possibly false). Not only does this take us to the heart of

critical philosophy in general, it will help us to overcome scepticism about the existence of moral values which are not relative to particular individual wants, preferences, and so on. For some of this scepticism is not, or at least not obviously, based on radical empiricist thinking.<sup>29</sup> Detailed discussion of these issues will follow in Chapter Seven.

We concentrate now on the concept of thought as possibly differing from how things really are. This is the conceptual core of what Hegel has called 'the fear of error'. Given that Hegel has at least raised the question of the presuppositions of critical philosophy, should we not follow him in attempting to trace the dialectical movement which arrives at (and then surpasses) the stage of critical philosophical questioning? Let us return briefly to the Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit. Here we see that Hegel's concern with 'the fear of error' as such, is closely tied up with his critique of Kant's epistemology. For Hegel identifies one of the presuppositions of the concern with falling into error, as the view of knowledge as a medium or instrument. Furthermore, he has already argued that such a view illegitimately presupposes a theory about the relations between subject and object, and about the possibility or otherwise of knowledge of the absolute.<sup>30</sup> In short, he claims that a particular kind of theory of knowledge is presupposed by any critical philosophical questioning. This is surely not the case. Whatever the merits (and they seem to me considerable) of Hegel's objections to Kantian epistemology, it must be possible for there to be reflection on the possibility

of error, and for there to be concern to avoid error, prior to the assumption of any specific epistemology. Indeed, I would argue that any specific epistemology presupposes the concern with falling into error, rather than the other way round. For an epistemology presupposes the concept of cognition, or knowledge. This concept is in turn possible only in relation to a grasp of the possibility of being in error. We can see this especially clearly where knowledge is understood as something along the lines of justified true belief. We cannot have the concept of truth here, without the concept of false belief. This last concept is, as we shall see, in turn possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with cases of error. Hegel is wrong, then, to identify the presuppositions of critical philosophical questioning in general, with the Kantian Critical Philosophy in particular. Still, the question as to the presuppositions of critical philosophy remains; and Hegel is clear on the central issue here. For him, such questioning occurs only at a determinate stage in the history of the self-formation of consciousness.<sup>31</sup> The first task of philosophy, as Hegel sees it, must then be to trace this process of self-formation from its beginnings (in 'sense-certainty', for Hegel). (This may even include an account of the process of abstraction through which the concept of abstract thought, employed in the starting-point proposed earlier, emerged.)

But this concern with processes of genesis misses the chance of a truly immanent critique of critical philosophical questioning. It misses the chance of showing how the presuppositions of critical

philosophy in general can be accommodated only by a philosophy which transcends the limitations of that questioning itself (and establishes, as Hegel desired, positive results). Hegel's Phenomenology inevitably lands itself instead with intractable difficulties. We can, as many have already, question the necessity of each movement in the dialectic. Even more important, we can ask why such a process of self-formation is necessary at all for the possibility of the critical concept of thought (as possibly false). For at the stage we have reached in our reflection, we have the concept of abstract thought (which may possibly diverge from how things are), but no consciousness, let alone a self. No matter how precious this concept may appear, in the light of what we understand about the processes which in fact led to its emergence, we need far more argument than Hegel gives us, if we are to show that such processes of self-formation are a necessary condition of that emergence. Let us then leave Hegel's discussion, and take up a more radical stance.

#### The Concept of Thought as an unchallengeable starting-point

Let us look again at the reflection on the concept of thought which has arisen as a candidate for a more thorough-going philosophical starting-point. It provides us with a starting-point in two important senses. First: expressed as "Thoughts can be false" it is unchallengeable, in so far as its truth is presupposed by any doubt, since doubt is precisely the raising of the issue of the possible falsity of a thought. Second: it takes up the conceptual core of

that interest which guided the process which resulted in its own emergence as a philosophical starting-point: to this extent it takes into account the conditions of its own existence. Nevertheless, we still do not have a starting-point without presuppositions; for any claim, thought or concept necessarily presupposes that the necessary conditions of its meaningfulness obtain. And a meaningless claim, thought or concept is not a claim, thought or concept at all. What we do have is an absolutely unchallengeable starting-point. Any attempt to challenge its validity must itself presuppose the existence of the concept of thought (as possibly false); and must presuppose in turn the necessary conditions of the possibility of that concept. This is an ad hominem argument at the highest level of generality. Any attempt to challenge this starting-point must itself presuppose it. It is now essential to investigate the necessary conditions of the possibility of this concept (and of the meaningfulness of the linguistic term in which it is expressed) - a kind of investigation with which Hegel did not particularly concern himself, but which has increasingly concerned twentieth-century philosophers. By discovering the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought, we overcome in advance any scepticism or doubt, since such scepticism necessarily employs that concept, and so necessarily presupposes that the necessary conditions of its possibility obtain.

There are close parallels between the argument of this chapter, and the argument traced through Chapters Two and Three. I will outline them here, with the hope that they will shed some light on each other. In Chapter Two, I argued that the critical empiricist

philosopher has a guiding interest in the justification of claims to knowledge. The question of justification is raised in the light of the presupposition that how things are experienced as being may differ from how they really are. Further, it was argued that, in order to play its part in the critical empiricist project, the concept of experience must have certain features. Without these features, the concept would not be able to fulfil its philosophical function, and critical empiricism would not be possible. To summarise the outcome of that discussion: the concept of experience required is the concept of experience as, intentionally, of items in an objective world, such that how things are experienced as being may be at variance with how things really are. In the present chapter, we have tried to find an absolutely unchallengeable starting-point for philosophy. Corresponding to the argument of Chapter Two, we have uncovered the guiding interest of all critical philosophy (indeed, all critical enquiry). This is the issue of the justification of claims to knowledge, in the light merely of the possibility of those claims being false. Again, it was argued that this project requires for its possibility a concept with certain essential features. Here it is the concept of thought, as possibly diverging from reality. How things are thought (or claimed) to be, may differ from how they really are. The basis for the parallel so far, is fairly clear. As outlined earlier,<sup>32</sup> the concept of experience functions in part as an epistemological alternative to naive realism. It can do this only because there is implicit in the experience a thought, judgement or claim as to how things are. The present chapter has focussed, and will

continue to focus, on that element of thought or judgement itself, abstracting from what we might call the stuff, or matter of experience.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly then, when the argument concerns the aspect of thought itself - rather than, for instance, the issue of sense-contents as providing for the meaning of words - the parallel is close. Let us take it further.

In Chapter Three, we saw that among the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of experience, is the existence of independent items in an objective world. Since the concept of experience is essential to empiricism, the existence of such items is a necessary condition of the possibility of empiricism itself. If such items exist, then the claim of the radical empiricist - that perhaps there exists nothing other than experience - must be false. Radical empiricism and its attendant scepticism are therefore possible only if false. They are thus fundamentally incoherent, and so untenable. In the present chapter, the aim is the even more general ad hominem argument outlined above. This is an argument to show that any critical questioning has certain presuppositions. These presuppositions concern the possibility of the concept of thought. The investigation of the necessary conditions of the possibility of that concept has, as I hope to show in later chapters, considerable potential. It will lead to the establishment of certain non-relative moral values. For the rest of this chapter, I will argue that, parallel to the refutation of radical empiricism, we can achieve a refutation of a kind of radical idealism. This argument will conclude that any scepticism,

empiricist or not, about the existence of a realm other than that of thought itself, must be fundamentally incoherent.

The argument will closely parallel that given in Chapter Three against radical empiricism. I shall take the opportunity that this parallel provides, for abbreviating the argument.

### The Refutation of Radical Idealism

Such a heading clearly needs elaboration. There have been many forms of idealism. Some of these have been closely linked with what I have been calling radical empiricism - I have in mind especially Edmund Husserl, but also Berkeley and Kant. Some, those of Hegel, or Fichte, less so. My aim in this section is not to classify varieties of idealism, nor to defend a particular account of what idealism consists in, but rather to produce an argument parallel to that in Chapter Three.<sup>34</sup> There, I argued that the radical empiricism which holds that perhaps there exists only experience, is incoherent. Here, I wish to argue that a radical idealism which holds that perhaps there exists only thought, is incoherent in a precisely similar way. It may seem difficult to find an adherent to this doctrine of radical idealism, and I am not particularly concerned with finding one. I am more interested in showing how an argument concerning the necessary conditions of the possibility of thought can get started. The label "radical idealism" is chosen so as to point up the parallel with radical empiricism, rather than as a name for a substantial chunk of philosophical literature. Even so, some implications for more traditional idealist doctrines will emerge.



Before getting on with the argument, let me again state the basis for the parallel with the argument to refute radical empiricism. The guiding interest of critical empiricist philosophy is the interrogation of claims to knowledge, in the light of the possibility that experience may differ from reality. Similarly, the guiding interest of critical philosophy in general, is the interrogation of claims to knowledge, in the light of the possibility that thoughts and claims may be false. That is, that how things are thought or claimed to be, may differ from how they really are. In each case, we are given an epistemological alternative to naive realism. In the case of empiricism, it is the thought or judgement implicit in experience, that provides for the epistemological alternative. In the case of what I am calling Radical Idealism, it is the thought itself, abstracted from any experiential 'matter', that does the job. In each case, it is the fact that the concept at issue - whether of experience, or thought - provides an epistemological alternative to naive realism that opens up the possibility for critical thought. In each case, it is on this point that the basic argument turns. Let us see how far the parallel runs.

The first attempt at a refutation of radical empiricism was based on trying to analyse the implications of the concept of experience. It was argued in Chapter Two that this must be the concept of experience as, intentionally, of independent items in an objective world, such that this experience may differ from the reality. Similarly, the concept of thought, in order to do its work in critical philosophy, must be the concept of thought as possibly differing from reality. In each case, the central concept of the philosophical project involves an essential reference to an objective reality, as possibly at variance with how things

are thought/experienced to be. Since the empiricist is committed to the claim that there is experience, it follows by conceptual implication that she is committed to the existence of an objective reality. This, in essence, was the argument of the First Attempt to refute radical empiricism. Similarly, if a critical philosophy is committed to the claim that there is thought then, in virtue of the parallel conceptual implication, it is committed to the existence of an objective reality. This could be the first attempt at refuting radical idealism.

This First Attempt ran into its First Objection. This was that the reference to objective reality could be avoided, or neutralised; so that the commitment to the existence of an objective reality could itself be side-stepped. The reply to this First Objection, was that any attempt to recast talk of objective reality into terms of the concept of experience would only re-introduce the commitment to the existence of that reality. Several responses to this reply were introduced and dealt with. Parallel to all this, would be an objection to our attempt at refuting radical idealism, which tried to avoid or neutralise the reference to objective reality carried by the critical concept of thought. This could be done by recasting talk of an objective reality into terms of the concept of thought itself. Reality could be treated as a kind of 'thought-construct', for example. Our reply would then be that such an attempt to remove the commitment to an objective reality would only succeed in reintroducing it, whenever the concept of thought was employed. Conceptual implications cannot be discarded at will, and without the reference to objective reality we could not have the required concept of thought at all. We could then deal with any response to this reply in a manner parallel to that adopted in Chapter Three.

So far, the parallel seems to hold. Having raised and overruled a first objection to the attempt to refute radical idealism, we can now take up a deeper objection. This will parallel the Second Objection made against the refutation of radical empiricism. That objection began by accepting that there must be an epistemologically objective reality, if there is to be any critical philosophical use of the concept of experience. It then argued that this does not show that there needs to exist any actual items inhabiting that reality. A precisely parallel objection can be made in connection with the concept of thought. If, the objection continues, talk of such a reality is merely a substantivising of talk about how things really are (in possible contrast with how they are thought to be), then it may well be the case that how things are is that there exist no actual independent inhabitants of that reality. That is, it may be that there are no items - such as material objects, or people - whose existence and operations are independent of how they are thought to be. What are we to make of this objection? As in the case of the empiricist, this deeper objection forces us to consider the necessary conditions of the possibility of the central concept at issue (here, the concept of thought). It is at this level, also, that we have identified the starting-point for philosophy. Furthermore, this objection brings with it the sceptical option of claiming that we know nothing of any actual items in any external world. To combat this, we need to go beyond the establishment of a conceptual entailment linking thought with reality. We have to consider how the concept of thought (as possibly false, diverging from reality) is possible.

The first step towards meeting this second main objection to the refutation of radical idealism parallels that of the argument against radical empiricism. We need to note a conceptual interdependence. We have established that the concept of thought involves a reference to objective reality as that from which thought may diverge. We also need to note that the epistemological concept of reality involves a reciprocating reference to thought, as that which may diverge from reality itself. This reciprocal reference parallels that between the concepts of thought and reality made in Chapter Three between the concept of reality and experience. Indeed, in each case it is the notion of thought - either in itself, or implicit in experience - which is the essential element, and which provides the epistemological alternative to naive realism. Critical philosophy, then, must work with this interdependent conceptual pair.

The question we must deal with now becomes "How is this conceptual pair possible?". This in turn leads us to ask how the required 'semantic' link with an extra-conceptual realm is possible. The argument here exactly parallels that given in refuting radical empiricism. That is, to begin with, neither concept can be possible merely by virtue of being understood in terms of the other. (Thought understood as that which may fail to match reality, and vice versa.) We would have an empty circle. To avoid this, there must be a link between the concepts and something other than the concepts themselves. But this link cannot be provided by other concepts, which mediate between the concepts of thought/reality and an extra-conceptual

realm. (For example, thought as the abstract content of certain mental events occurring in people.) For the use of such everyday mediating concepts would carry commitments to the existence of items independent of thought. Radical idealism, as I have described it, is attempting to eschew such commitments. Nor can we establish one of our conceptual pair independently of the other, by directly linking it with an instance in the extra-conceptual realm, and then providing an understanding of the other concept in terms of the first. For if we had a concept of thought, or of reality, which did not already contain an internal reference to the other, then it cannot be the concept we require. Neither one of our conceptual pair can be established independently, and then pushed into a relationship with the other: they come together or not at all. The conclusion of this argument parallels the conclusion of the argument at this stage of the refutation of radical empiricism. It is that the 'semantic' link with an extra-conceptual realm, required for the concept of thought to be possible, is itself provided for by none of the following means: mutual definition or understanding in terms of the concept of reality; definition or understanding in terms of other, mediating, concepts; an independent direct link with instances of thought.

We can escape from this apparent impasse only in a way which parallels that taken in Chapter Three. That is, we must recognise that the conceptual pair - "thought"/"reality" - is possible only in virtue of being 'semantically' linked, as a pair

with an extra-conceptual realm. Only in this way can the pair of concepts escape vacuity. But the relevant feature of this extra-conceptual realm cannot be just an instance of how things are thought to be, or just an instance of how things really are. We have seen that neither of these can by themselves provide for the possibility of either one of the concepts, let alone for the interrelated pair. If this pair of concepts is to escape vacuity (and if the corresponding linguistic terms are to possess their required meaning), then the salient feature of that extra-conceptual realm must be a situation, within which how things are, and how they are thought to be, are distinct but interrelated aspects. That is, not only are the concepts of thought and reality inescapably interrelated; but how things are thought to be, and how they really are, must be interrelated aspects of the extra conceptual realm. It is the 'semantic' link between the conceptual pair on the one hand, and the actual situation in which thought and reality are themselves interrelated on the other, which makes that conceptual pair possible. The concepts come together, in relation to such situations - indeed, the understanding of these situations will be articulated through these concepts. Having exhausted the alternative accounts of how the 'semantic' link between the concept of thought and an extra-conceptual realm is possible, the above account is the only possibility left. The link between situations like that characterised above, and the interdependent pair of concepts of thought and reality, is thus a necessary condition of the concept of thought. It is thereby also a necessary condition of radical idealism, and indeed of all critical philosophical enquiry. To

continue the parallel with the refutation of radical empiricism, let us now have a closer look at the type of situation which seems to figure so largely in the argument.

We have seen that the concept of thought is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with a situation in which how things are, and how they are thought to be, are distinct but interrelated aspects. As in the case of the concept of experience, we can say more about this. If it is to be the kind of situation in connection with which the concepts of thought and reality are made possible, then there must be some distinction to be made in that situation, between how things are and how they are thought to be. As long as there is no such distinction to be made - that is, as long as thought matches reality - then there is nothing for the concepts expressed by the terms 'thought' and 'reality' to latch on to. They can have no grip on an extra-conceptual realm that would save them from being merely vacuous. The concepts cannot exist in such circumstances, nor the words have their required meaning. The words "thought" and "reality" can express the required concepts only by being semantically linked with the kind of situation, in which how things really are actually diverges from how things are thought to be: that is, the kind of situation we call "error". Only by virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations of error, where there is an actual divergence between thought and reality, is the concept of thought possible. Without such a link, therefore, radical idealism - indeed, any critical philosophy - would not be possible. Again, we have reached a stage parallel to that reached in the refutation of radical empiricism. There, the focus was on experiential error; that

is, on situations where how things are experienced as being is at variance with how they really are. Here, however, we can attend to error in general; those situations in which thought is false. Let us now look at a response to the argument of this refutation so far: a response which raises echoes of a traditionally idealistic position.

The Coherence Theory of Truth: a response to the argument so far.

In the refutation of radical idealism, I have so far argued that the concept of thought is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations of error, in which how things are diverges from how they are thought to be. One response to this argument takes the form of trying to recast talk of error into terms of thought itself. It runs as follows. In talking of error, I have used the terms and concept "thought" and "reality". Now, this response argues, once in possession of the concept of thought we can construe cases of error in the following way. We can say that we have a case of error when one thought fails to fit in, or cohere, with the main body of other thoughts. This thought is therefore to be rejected as false. Where error is understood in terms of a lack of coherence among thoughts, truth is correspondingly grasped as coherence. We do not then need the concept of how things really are, the response continues, since the distinction between how things are thought to be, and how they are, can be provided for in terms of the concept of thought alone. After all, in rejecting one thought on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things really are, we are just rejecting one thought on the basis of its lack of coherence with another



(the presumed awareness). Indeed, that presumed awareness may itself later be rejected as a false thought, on the basis of a further presumed awareness. Nor does such a series of 'undeceptions' have any apparent limit. Such considerations give rise to the notion that we have a series of thoughts, with no intrinsic guarantee of any 'correspondence' with an objective reality. The notions of truth and falsehood can then only amount to the coherence and lack of coherence among those thoughts.

This response is most acceptable to idealist philosophers.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, as the parallel with the response at this stage in the refutation of radical idealism suggests, it is also one to which certain empiricists can be drawn.<sup>36</sup> We are in a position to see why this response is unacceptable. The account of error (and truth) offered here cannot succeed. For that account presupposes the availability of the concept of thought. This concept is in turn possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with cases of error. The primary grasp of error cannot then be given in terms of the concept of thought, since that would be to presuppose exactly that which the argument seeks to account for. We can reject this response. Let us turn to a further development of the argument against radical idealism.<sup>37</sup>

#### Thought and its rejection

I want now to develop the argument in a way which parallels that of the refutation of radical empiricism, and which leads to the final refutation of radical idealism.

In preparation for this development of the argument, we can make another point with a parallel in the refutation of empiricism.

If there is to be a distinction between how things are and how they are thought to be, then the concepts which articulate the salient thoughts must be what Strawson calls 'concepts of the objective'. If thought were, instead, only about items such that no distinction could be drawn between how they were, and how they were thought to be, then there would be no possibility of error. Further, as concepts of the objective must be used within thought, these concepts must not contain any implicit or explicit reference to thought itself. Nor must they be reducible in any way to the concept of thought. For this would be to push the question of the possibility of the concept of thought one stage farther back, rather than to answer it. Thought must be, at least in part, of items such that how things are with regard to their existence and operations, is independent of how they are thought to be. Thought must be, intentionally, of an 'external world' in as strong a sense as we could wish. What implications follow?

On the basis of what has been said about the concepts through which thought must be articulated, let us look further at the nature of error. Consider two examples.

A. I park my bicycle outside the library, and get out some books. Emerging from the library, I realise that the bicycle has been taken. B. During a break from revising for the afternoon's examination, I glance at the timetable and note with horror that the examination is being held right now - this morning rather than this afternoon. These examples expand the discussion of experiential error undertaken in connection with the concept of experience, to a more general notion of error. In

A. we do not need a perceptual experience, intentionally, of the bicycle, which is then rejected as, say, an hallucination. It is rather that the thought, or belief, that the bicycle is there (which may never have explicitly entered my mind, or informed a particular perceptual experience), is brought to recognition by my reaction to how things really are. In B., we have an example which shows that the awareness of how things really are, which grounds our rejection of how things are thought to be as false, need not be a direct perceptual one.

Now in parallel with the discussion of the concept of experience, we can see that how things are thought to be, is rejected in these examples on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things are.<sup>38</sup> This is not a bare awareness that how things are differs from how they are thought to be. It is a determinate awareness of how things positively are, which excludes how things are thought to be from being true. So that, for example, if the examination is this morning, it cannot be this afternoon. We have seen that, for such a conflict to be possible, the awareness of how things really are (as well as the awareness of how things are thought to be), must be articulated in "concepts of the objective".<sup>39</sup> In these examples of error, the recognition of how things are thought to be, as differing from how they really are, is based on a (presumed) awareness of how things are with certain independent items in an objective world. This now seems to open the way to a development of the argument parallel to that suggested in the refutation of radical empiricism.

The suggested development is that cases of error, if they are to provide for the 'semantic' link with the concept of thought,

must be situations in which how things are thought to be, is at variance with how they really are with independent items in an external world. It then looks as if we are committed to the existence of such items and such a world, as an essentially necessary condition of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, and so of radical idealism, and critical philosophy in general. The radical idealism described above would be refuted, since its existence would require the falsity of the claim that perhaps there exists nothing other than thought. The objective reality argued for earlier, would have been shown to be inhabited. This is the conclusion we want, but, as in the refutation of radical empiricism, the argument needs testing.

In Chapter Three, the argument at this stage was tested against the objection that an alternative account of experiential error was possible, which would provide for the 'semantic' link with the concept of experience without involving a commitment to the existence of a populated external world. The alternative account there proposed was that there could be cases of experiential error where the grasp of how things really are consisted merely of the bare awareness that there is no inhabited objective reality at all; that there exists nothing other than experience. The parallel suggestion here, would be that there could be cases of error where how things are thought to be is rejected on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things are; and that this (presumed) awareness could consist in the bare awareness that there exists nothing (other than thought itself): that the objective reality was uninhabited. As before, I find it extremely hard to make much of this suggestion, but the argument against it is the same as that advanced in Chapter Three.

Briefly, the argument is this. Our ordinary everyday awareness that there is nothing<sup>40</sup>, has two features. First: the 'nothing' of which we become aware, is not absolute and unconditioned, but is determined in relation to a particular concept. Thus, in looking for something to drink, I find food, clothes and empty cupboards: but nothing to drink. Second: there is a certain horizon within which nothing is discovered. Thus there is nothing in the house to drink, but plenty to drink in the shops and pubs. Now it seems that what is being proposed above, as part of the objection to the argument against radical idealism, is the possibility of an awareness that there is nothing which has neither of these features. That is, it is suggested that there can be an awareness that there is nothing, which is neither limited to a certain horizon, nor determined in respect of a particular concept. Is it possible that there be an awareness which lacks these features? It might be argued that the proposed awareness of nothing is, in fact, limited to a certain horizon, namely, that of objective reality itself. The awareness that there is nothing at least confines itself to this boundary. What is more critical, is the point concerning the determination of the 'nothing' in respect of a particular concept. Here, the idea seems to be that of an awareness of absolutely nothing: that is, an awareness of nothing, which is not determined in respect of a particular concept (e.g. nothing to drink). The suggestion we have to deal with, is that there can be cases of error in which how things are thought to be is rejected as false, on the basis of an awareness that there is

absolutely nothing. But it emerges (as it did in Chapter Three) that an awareness that there is absolutely nothing will not work here. For one thing, such a (presumed) awareness must be false, since the awareness is itself something. Nor could such an awareness provide for an account of error, since error requires a thought, and this proposed awareness would rule out the existence of anything. The awareness that there is nothing has to be qualified - it cannot be awareness of an absolute nothingness.<sup>41</sup>

The qualification that is required here - which provides the concept with respect to which the 'nothing' is determined - must be this: there must be an awareness that there exists nothing other than thought itself. It is on this basis, that any positive claim about independent items in an objective world would be rejected as mere false thoughts, thus making possible instances of error. 'Semantic' linking with such instances would in turn make possible the concept of thought. But this qualification of the 'nothing' raises a problem. For it saves us from an awareness of absolute non-being, only at the cost of presupposing exactly that which it was to provide for, namely, the existence of the concept of thought. The proposed awareness, that there is nothing other than thought, must employ (if only implicitly) the concept of thought. It cannot then form part of an adequate account of the possibility of that concept. This alternative account of error is therefore untenable, and the objection based on it is met. Our argument above, paralleling that of the refutation of empiricism, shows that there must be cases of error in which how things are thought to be is dismissed

as false on the basis of a positive (presumed) awareness of how things really are with independent items in an objective 'external' world. This awareness carries a commitment to the existence of such a world and its inhabitants.

Radical idealism is therefore incoherent, since its very possibility (the possibility of its central concept) presupposes the falsehood of its central claim, that perhaps there exists only thought. If this gives us the argument for rejecting radical idealism, let us give it a further test.

This second test, paralleling the test presented in the refutation of radical empiricism, involves facing the objection that, having got the concept of thought, we can then use it in a reassessment of our (presumed) awareness of how things are, so as to cancel the apparent commitment to an external, objective world. For recall the examples of error we have looked at.<sup>#2</sup> Perhaps in each case we were right the first time, and our presumed awareness of how things are was not, in fact, veridical. Or perhaps we were wrong both times. Reflection along these lines seems to lead to the conclusion that we can retract any particular judgement as to how things are in the world. If we can do this, then surely it is possible that all these particular, positive awarenesses are false, and that there exist no actual items independent of thought.

The argument against this objection is essentially the same as that presented in Chapter Three. Briefly, it is this. If all (presumed) awarenesses of how things really are, are to be re-assessed as merely thoughts, so that judgement as to their

veridicality is suspended, then we presuppose the availability of the concept of thought. But this concept presupposes, as a necessary condition of its possibility, a 'semantic' link with at least one instance of error, in which the (presumed) awareness of how things are is taken at face-value. We can then re-assess this particular awareness, as long as we can link the concept of thought to other cases, in which the (presumed) awareness of how things are is taken at face-value. If we try to suspend judgement on all such awarenesses at once, we sever the possibility of a 'semantic' link between the concept of thought and an extra-conceptual realm. This in turn deprives the concept of its very possibility, and the term "thought" of its required meaning. If this argument succeeds, then it entails a certain commitment. That is, although we are not committed to the truth of any particular (presumed) awareness of how things are with independent items in an objective world, we are inescapably committed to the existence of at least one such awareness as beyond question. We are therefore committed to the existence of such a world and its inhabitants, though not as yet to the truth of more particular claims about them. Radical idealism is refuted.

If this argument is successful, then it establishes the existence of the external world as immune from any scepticism. Such scepticism would itself necessarily presuppose the existence of the concept of thought (as possibly false), and hence, in turn, the existence of the external world itself. By tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of the central concept of critical philosophical inquiry, we can thus set limits on what can legitimately be called a question. But we still have the



problem of what comes next. If the external world exists, so what? Have we gone through all this just to re-establish what only philosophers have doubted in the first place? I am glad to be able to say "No", here. Although we have so far concentrated on an issue which concerns peculiarly philosophers of a certain psychological stamp, the argument has more in store. For we have not come anywhere near the end of the investigation into the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought. And all such conditions we uncover, will also be immune from sceptical questioning. I will argue that these conditions include the existence of certain non-relative moral values. The path to that conclusion begins with the next section.

#### How is the concept of thought possible?

The discussion here will parallel that in the last section of Chapter Three. Faced with the problems of giving an account of the possibility of the concept of thought, which does not already presuppose that concept, the question of whether any such account is possible may arise. In this section I want to provide a non-circular account of how the critical concept of thought is possible. This will also help to set the scene for the account of the relationships between thought, language and the subject which I take up in Chapter Five.

The problem here is this. The concept of thought requires for its possibility a 'semantic' link with instances of error. The primary grasp of cases of error cannot, however, be that which we have from our ordinary everyday standpoint. Having access to the concepts of thought and reality, we can understand

error as a situation in which thought fails to match reality. But this understanding clearly employs just those concepts which the grasp of cases of error is to help make possible. While our philosophical strategy requires a link with situations in which thought and reality are at odds, these cases of error cannot be primarily understood in terms of thought failing to agree with reality. Here, the order of primary understanding reverses that of stages in the philosophical strategy. But if the primary grasp of error cannot use these concepts, then how is such a grasp possible at all? Consider some of the suggestions, in connection with the example of the stolen bicycle.<sup>43</sup>

First: we must reject the idea that we can grasp error in terms of a lack of coherence among thoughts, for reasons given earlier.<sup>44</sup> Second: consider this suggestion. If we take the initial thought (that my bicycle awaits me) and the (presumed) awareness of how things really are (my bicycle is gone), as both naive awarenesses, such that the question of their veridicality or otherwise has not, and cannot yet, be asked. We then have an awareness that my bike awaits me, followed by an awareness that my bike does not await me. Such conflicting awarenesses, runs the suggestion, must surely generate a grasp of the situation as one of error. But this is not so. In order for this series of awarenesses to lead to the conclusion that here was a case of error, there would have to be an understanding of the fact that the two naive awarenesses were in conflict, such that at least one of them was non-veridical. For the understanding of the awarenesses as in mutual conflict amounts to this. If either one is veridical, then the other cannot be - it must be a non-veridical thought. The understanding of the awarenesses as mutually conflicting

therefore presupposes the critical concept of thought, and the concept of reality as that from which it may diverge. It cannot, then, be used in the grasp of cases of error which is to help make these concepts themselves possible. Nothing in the mere juxtaposition of such awarenesses - which we, from our standpoint, can regard as mutually conflicting - can generate of itself the grasp of the situation as one of error. Nothing here forces that understanding to emerge.

We can see further into our problem. The primary grasp of error cannot be our ordinary one, nor one in terms of lack of coherence among thoughts, nor one in terms of mutually conflicting 'naive' awarenesses. How, then, is a grasp of error possible at all? The way out of this difficulty parallels that taken in Chapter Three. The primary grasp of error cannot take the form of some sort of synthesis of our understanding of its components - that is, of how things are thought to be, and how they really are - since the understanding of those components itself presupposes the primary grasp of cases of error. But if this is so, then the primary grasp of the situation of error must be a grasp of it as a totality; as a whole. Within this totality, as subsequent reflective analysis can show, thought and reality are interrelated. But the grasp of error as a totality must precede the conceptualisation of its internal components.<sup>45</sup>

How is a grasp of this specific kind of totality possible? It cannot be grasped from the 'inside' - as a synthesis of its components - since this would presuppose the concepts at issue. The only alternative is that error be grasped as a totality from

the 'outside'. Further, this whole is to be a specific totality: one in which thought and reality are, as reflection will show, interrelated. It must then be marked off or delimited, from that which is 'outside' it. If it were not so delimited, then there would be no way of grasping the totality as a whole at all. Thus the primary grasp of the totality which is error, must be of it in relation to an 'outside' context, from which it is delimited. We have to draw the boundary of the totality from the outside, as it cannot be drawn from within.

Let us take this approach further. The way in which this totality is 'delimited from without' has to be such that the totality thus delimited is indeed one of error (rather than, say, of frustrated desire). The totality thus delimited must be one which can be reflectively analysed as a case in which how things are thought to be fails to match up with how they really are. How can this totality be grasped from the 'outside'? It cannot be grasped as a positive entity in its own right, like trees, or people, for it consists in a failure which refers to a wider context. But how could the totality which is error be grasped in a negative manner?

The analogy with an inadequate carburettor was introduced at this stage of the argument in Chapter Three, to try to clarify the issue here. In the analogy, it was suggested that the failure of the carburettor can be grasped in its relation to an outside context: it is a failure to achieve a mechanical harmony

with other parts of the car, which generates a breakdown. Similarly, a grasp of cognitive failure can be grasped in its relation to an 'outside' - it is a failure to achieve a cognitive harmony, which can lead to a breakdown in the smooth running of my life (for example, my failing this morning's examination). This primary grasp of error as a cognitive failure related to a wider context, allows for the subsequent analysis of its components - how things are thought to be, and how they really are. The grasp of error cannot be obtained by the reverse course - beginning by grasping how things are, how they are thought to be, and seeing that the structure of the thought differs from that of reality - for two reasons. One is the familiar one, that it would presuppose the concepts at issue. The second reason is that such a procedure would provide us only with a comparison of the thought and the reality. It would not of itself give us a grasp of the situation as one of failure. It is the notion of the possibility of failure which gives critical philosophical questioning its point. A divergence between thought and reality does not of itself tell us where the fault lies, if anywhere. Such a divergence can only be of interest to the critique of knowledge, if it is construed as a failure of thought, rather than of reality. These two points show that the primary grasp of error can only be obtained through the negative delimitation of that totality from an outside context of cognitive harmony.

A further point concerns the availability of the notion of cognitive harmony. This notion amounts to that of a coincidence of how things are, with how they are thought to be. It follows

that the delimitation of error from the context of cognitive harmony is logically prior to the availability of the notion of cognitive harmony itself. Prior to that delimitation, that cognitive harmony is unquestioned and unquestionable: for to question it would require just those concepts of thought and reality which are at that stage unavailable. This point leads, as in Chapter Three, to the question of how this delimitation of the totality of error, from a context of cognitive harmony, is supposed to happen.

The problem in Chapter Three was focussed by looking at the suggestion that error is marked off from cognitive harmony by virtue of a comparison of the two situations. On the one side, how things are thought to be accords with how they really are: on the other side, it does not. But such a comparison would presuppose the concepts of thought and reality which it was supposed to help make possible. We must reject this suggestion. But if we cannot legitimately use these concepts in delimiting error from its 'outside', what is the alternative? The only alternative is this: the delimitation, from the context of cognitive harmony, which makes possible the primary grasp of error, must be non-conceptual. For any conceptual grasp of the relation between error and harmony presupposes the availability of the concepts at issue. We can have no abstract, conceptual marking off of the one from the other. But what sense are we to make of the notion of a non-conceptual grasp of error in its negative relationship with cognitive harmony?

The answer to this question (in parallel with that in Chapter Three) involves recognising that the total situation

of error cannot be delimited from the context of cognitive harmony in any abstract manner which requires the concepts we are trying to account for. The grasp of the relationship between error and harmony cannot take the form of understanding the case of error as a failure to live up to an abstract ideal of cognitive harmony, which we already have in mind. That delimitation of error from cognitive harmony can only take the form of an actual rupture, or breakdown, in that harmony. The relationship between error and cognitive harmony is the relationship of error to that in which it constitutes a rupture, or breakdown. It is this delimitation of error as a concrete breakdown in cognitive harmony - rather than as a failure to live up to an abstract ideal - which makes possible a non-conceptual grasp of the totality of error. Let us use the case of the stolen bicycle as an illustration.

As I leave the library, no question as to the truth of the thought that my bicycle awaits me is raised. When I perceive its absence, there is a sense of shock. It feels as though a small sand-bag is suspended from a point about an inch behind my navel. This shock is the non-conceptual registration of a cognitive rupture; of the breakdown of an unquestioned cognitive relation with reality into error. Reflection on this breakdown can lead to its analysis as an instance of thought failing to match reality. It is, however, only the non-conceptual grasp of the relation between cognitive harmony and error, which makes the critical concepts of thought and reality at all possible.

As in Chapter Three, this account gives us an idea of the 'semantic' link between the concept of thought and instances of error. The concepts of thought and reality are the way in which the non-conceptual registration of a breakdown in cognitive harmony gets articulated. They are not somehow brought along and 'ostensively' put in touch particular cases. Rather than follow up the implications of this idea for the philosophy of language, I feel I must offer an apology.

This section, and indeed the whole of the second half of this chapter, has essentially involved the repetition of the argument given in Chapter Three; only in connection with the concept of thought, instead of the concept of experience. Although I feel it important to trace the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought, and although it is important to show how these conditions limit the scope of what critical philosophy can call in question, the repetitive aspect of some of the present chapter is bound to be somewhat trying. I apologise for this. Before leaving the chapter, however, there is a point to be made in preparing for the discussion which follows in Chapter Five. It concerns the very abstract concept of thought with which we have so far been working.

### Thought and Thinking

The argument in this chapter has focussed on the critical concept of thought as a kind of Platonic, 'third world' thought-content, in abstraction from any actual thinking. This, I argued, is the barest



concept which can make critical philosophical enquiry possible. As I suggested during the process of abstraction through which this concept was obtained,<sup>46</sup> many philosophers would be unhappy with the notion that we can entertain that concept in total abstraction from thinking itself. We have now reached a stage in the argument where we can retrace one step of that process of abstraction, and show that the concept of thought in its Platonic sense necessarily presupposes an understanding of that thought-content as the content of some actual thinking. We cannot remain with the very abstract concept of thought, but must recognise the presuppositions it brings with it.

The argument is this.<sup>47</sup> The critical concept of thought is possible only in the context of reflection on a breakdown in cognitive harmony which has been non-conceptually registered. So much was argued in the preceding section. Now, from our conceptual vantage-point, as ordinary adults who have gone through the process of acquiring the relevant concepts, we can talk of this harmony in terms of thought and reality matching up: and here it seems that we need no more than the notion of a Platonic thought-content. But if that harmony consisted merely in an abstract relation between a Platonic thought-content and how things really are, then no non-conceptual registration of its breakdown would be possible. For if the harmony between thought and reality obtains only at the abstract level of an abstract relationship between the 'contents' of thought and reality, then a breakdown in that relationship can only be

registered conceptually: through an awareness of the abstract thought-content, and of how that content compares with how things really are. But such a comparison of thought with reality would already presuppose the concepts of thought and reality themselves, and so cannot form part of an account of their possibility. For a non-conceptual registration of breakdown to be possible - one which does not make the illicit presupposition just mentioned - then the cognitive harmony must have a more concrete aspect. Reality itself, we might think, is 'concrete' enough; but what is it for its harmonious relationship with thought to be 'concrete' too? If that relationship is to consist in more than an abstract coincidence of how things are with how they are thought to be, then it must obtain at a different level also. This other level at which cognitive harmony holds, must be such as to make possible subsequent abstraction to the abstract level of comparison between thought and reality. For that to be possible, it must in turn be the case that the thought-content informs this concrete level at which cognitive harmony obtains. What does all this mean? The example of error we have previously introduced can help to clarify the point. Recall the non-conceptual registration of a breakdown in cognitive harmony, which was occasioned by my awareness that my bicycle was not, as I had believed, outside the library. This registration was possible only because the abstract thought-content "My bicycle is outside" informed my concrete relationship with reality. That thought informed my practical involvements with the world (had I not thought as I did, I would not have acted as I did). Without

this very concrete aspect of the relationship between thought and reality, the registration of a breakdown in cognitive harmony could only have taken the form of a comparison between the abstract thought-content and reality. But such a comparison would presuppose the concepts of thought and reality which we are trying to account for. The relationship of cognitive harmony between thought and reality, must then have a non-abstract, concrete aspect, if a non-conceptual registration of its breakdown is to be possible. The abstract thought-content must inform a concrete thinking about how things are. This concrete thinking cannot consist merely in the favourable entertaining of an abstract thought-content, but must take the form of what has sometimes been called a 'lived' awareness or consciousness of the world. The conclusion to be drawn is this: the critical concept of thought, which our philosophical strategy took as its starting-point, necessarily presupposes the existence of consciousness, or thinking, as that of which it is the content. The concept of thought as a Platonic, third world entity cannot be sustained by itself, but refers us to actual consciousness as a necessary condition of its possibility.

This conclusion, by putting the notion of an abstract thought-content back into the context of actual, concrete consciousness or thinking, retraces one step in the process of abstraction undertaken earlier in this chapter. In Chapter Five, I want to continue the investigation into the necessary

conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought,  
and to retrace other steps in that process of abstraction.  
This will take us into a discussion of the relationships  
between the critical concept of thought (as possibly false),  
and the notions of subject, and of language.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUBJECT, THOUGHT, AND LANGUAGE

#### Introduction

In discussing radical empiricism, and then critical philosophical inquiry in general, I have argued that the possibility of their central concepts requires a 'semantic' link with cases of error; cases within which how things are thought, or experienced, as being differs from how they are. I have argued that the necessary conditions for the possibility of recognition of such cases of epistemic divergence include the existence of an independent, objective reality. This removes the possibility of a coherent scepticism about the existence of such a reality, since that existence is a necessary condition of that scepticism. But we are now again faced with the question of where, if we accept the argument so far, to go next. Do we return to a naive realism? Surely there are possibilities for scepticism within the framework of acceptance of the existence of the external world. What implications does the argument so far presented have for, for example, scepticism about the existence of objective causal powers, of other minds, or of non-relative moral values? Merely stating the problems which exist here is enough to rule out an acceptance of naive realism. In this chapter I want to take a direction suggested by the argument of the previous chapter. I wish to begin to lay the foundation for a theory of moral value, by tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of scepticism concerning the existence of any moral values which are not relative to

individual needs, preferences and so on. All scepticism relies crucially on the critical concept of thought. The necessary conditions of the possibility of that concept thus provide us with a foundation which cannot coherently be put in question. The claim that those conditions obtain cannot, if the argument is valid, be coherently questioned, since such questioning itself presupposes the truth of the claim. In this chapter I shall continue the investigation into those necessary conditions.

To set the scene for the investigation that follows, let me recapitulate some points made in the last chapter, which will prove relevant to the concerns of the present chapter. It was argued there that the critical concept of thought is possible only on condition that there exists a 'semantic' link between that concept and an extra-conceptual realm. Only such a link can give the concept 'meaning', or 'content'. This link cannot be established for either concept independently of the other: the concepts come together. Nor can the relevant feature of the extra-conceptual realm be just an instance of how things are thought to be, or just an instance of how things really are. This 'semantic' link is possible only where the interdependent pair of concepts, of thought and reality, is linked as a pair with a situation in which thought and reality are themselves already related. It was then argued that we cannot continue with the notion of thought as an abstract, Platonic, 'third world' entity, but that that notion from abstract thought-content is possible only by means of abstraction from the concrete thinking,

or consciousness, of which it is the content. One step in the process of abstraction, whereby the concept of thought as an abstract content was obtained, was thereby retraced.<sup>1</sup> In the present chapter I want to argue that two other steps in that process can be similarly retraced. I want to argue first, that thought is necessarily a mode of existence of something which 'has' it, a 'subject'; and second, that the conception of the thinking subject is in turn possible only by abstraction from the prior conception of the subject as speaking. I will conclude the chapter with some general remarks about the relation between thought and language. I begin by making some preliminary historical remarks about the relation between thought and the subject.

### The Thinking Subject: Historical Preliminaries

The question of the nature of the relationship between thought or experience and a subject - a thinker or experiencer - has been the concern of a great many philosophers. I cannot hope here to review the different theories that have been proposed; even less to evaluate them. Instead, I should like to lay down what I see as some significant historical markers in this area.

The argument in modern philosophy begins with Descartes:

I noticed that while I was trying to think everything false, it must needs be that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth "I am thinking, therefore I exist" was so solid and secure that the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics could not overthrow it, I judged that I need not scruple to accept it as the first principle of philosophy that I was seeking.<sup>2</sup>

The Cartesian Cogito has a number of different formulations in Descartes' own work, and even more interpretations in the work of commentators. Let us look briefly at one interpretation which is to my mind the most interesting philosophically, and one of the most plausible textually.<sup>3</sup>

The structure of the Cogito according to this interpretation is as follows: "I think" expresses the immediacy of a Cartesian cogitatio to immanent reflection: it is thus indubitable. The "I" here is perhaps best construed as merely a grammatical convenience, after Russell. This will save the enterprise from triviality, keep the importance of the cogitatio as that which is strictly present, and render more intelligible Descartes' stress on "ego" in the conclusion only of the Cogito. Now, for Descartes, the next step is taken with the aid of the natural light in our souls. This light shows us that thought is an attribute, and thus belongs to a substance of which it is an attribute. By intellectual intuition - which need not use the principles of natural light as explicit premises - we gain "I exist" as the necessary conclusion from "I think".

It is clear that the burden of validity of this argument falls largely on the principles of natural light which are supposed to



guide us to the intuition of the existence of the ego. And, as Kenny notes, these principles are often expressions of doctrines taught by the Jesuits at La Fleche.<sup>4</sup> How much weight can they bear? There are two issues which I want to keep as the focus of attention in this section. The first, and most important for our argument, concerns the existence of a subject which has thoughts. The difficulty seems to me to be this. If we start off by taking the concept of thought (or cogitatio, or experience) for granted, perhaps as established by direct ostension, then the grounds for any inference or intuition as to the existence of a subject, will seem shaky. If we can begin by talking about, and reflecting on, thoughts, whence comes the need for a subject? The principles of natural light are in need of some justification. The second issue is that of the identity of the subject. This is raised, with clear relevance to Descartes, by Kant. If we have an intellectual intuition of the existence of the ego as the subject of a particular thought, what makes it the same ego as that whose existence is intuited on the basis of reflection on a different thought? Why could it not be that we have here a series of different substances, one for each thought, one after another?<sup>5</sup> Both these issues are taken up by Hume.

In the Treatise, Hume, considering the notion of personal identity, claims that we have no constant and invariable impression as would provide for the idea of a self which is identical throughout the flux of ideas and impressions. The

question of the identity of the self is one to which he admits to having no answer. In considering the question of how we can move from a particular experience or thought, to the existence of a subject of that experience or thought, Hume gives us this famous passage:

After what manner, therefore, do our particular perceptions belong to the self; and how are they connected with it? For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception.<sup>6</sup>

The only conclusion he can draw is that the self is nothing but a bundle of perceptions. Hume puts his finger on the basic problem here:

Suppose the mind to be reduc'd even below the level of an oyster. Suppose it to have only one perception, as of thirst or hunger. Consider it in that situation. Do you conceive anything but merely that perception? Have you any notion of self or substance? If not, the addition of other perceptions can never give you that notion.<sup>7</sup>

The point I take from this, is that if we assume that we have a grasp of thoughts or experiences (perceptions) independently of the concept of a subject which has them, then there is no way of establishing the existence of such a subject. We cannot get beyond the existence of experience towards the subject, just as we could not get beyond the existence of experience to the external world in Chapter One. These are both points which occupied Husserl for most of the working life: here, we can look at how he dealt with the question of the subject.

Husserl's thoughts on the ego, or subject, have a very chequered career. Early on, in the *Logical Investigations*, he offers the very Humean confession "that I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive, necessary centre of relations".<sup>8</sup> He accompanies this with the denial that any such ego is involved in the essence of an intentional experience itself.<sup>9</sup> This Humean position has changed by the time of this flat footnote to the second edition of the *Investigations*:

I have since managed to find this ego, i.e. have learnt not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic.<sup>10</sup>

What reasoning can lie behind such a complete change of mind? Husserl, throughout his philosophical work, takes his starting-point as the Cartesian cogitatio. For Husserl, as for Descartes, we can achieve positive results in philosophy only by suspending judgement on the claims we make from the 'natural attitude'. These are the ordinary everyday claims we make about objects existing in the external world, and so forth. After this suspension of judgement (often termed a "reduction", or "epoché"), we find a residue. The existence and content of the pure cogitationes are given, and indubitable. But whereas in the Logical Investigations Husserl was content with investigating this realm of cogitationes for their own sake, in later works we find that, after the suspension of the natural attitude, we acquire not just the pure cogitationes, but also an ego as their subject. Thus I acquire myself "as the pure ego, with the pure stream of my cogitationes".<sup>11</sup> This ego "always and necessarily exists in

cogitationes".<sup>12</sup> It is "grasped in immediate intuition".<sup>13</sup> It is identical through all actual and possible experiences.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for Husserl, in reflection on pure experience I apprehend the absolute self as undeniably existing, as the pure subject of the flowing conscious life. The difficulty we have with all this, is to know how far this takes us beyond Descartes' principles of natural light. If my grasping, with apodictic evidence, the existence of the pure ego as living in the cogitationes, is meant to be a matter of immediate intellectual intuition, then surely there can be no room for controversy. But there is controversy. The Husserl/Descartes thesis has been seriously disputed by philosophers like Hume, Sartre,<sup>15</sup> and even the younger Husserl himself. Again, the basic difficulty seems to be that if we take for granted an independent grasp of thought, or experience, then the move to the existence of a subject is both superfluous - since we can investigate the cogitationes without it - and unjustified. Indeed, if we look at Husserl's account of the relationship between the ego and pure cogitationes, we tend to get a series of strained and unsatisfying metaphors. The ego is present in all acts of consciousness as 'living' in them. It 'shoots' its 'ray' through every actual cogitatio towards the object. It is the 'identical pole' of the stream of conscious life.<sup>16</sup> Now there is far more to Husserl's theory of the subject than a set of metaphors. The issue becomes far too complex to deal with here.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it is true to say that the two issues - the existence and identity of the subject -

with which we are primarily concerned in this section, are never adequately resolved in Husserl's work. Let us turn, then, to the different approach opened up by Kant.<sup>18</sup>

Underlying Kant's theory of the subject is the concept of experience as dependent on both sensibility and understanding:

Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.<sup>19</sup>

In his own argument, Kant agrees with Hume that no necessary connection between experiences is provided by the experiences themselves. He moves on to say that any such synthesis can only be effected by the subject. I want to consider not this argument itself, but the version of it offered by Strawson.<sup>20</sup> Strawson rejects what he sees as Kant's transcendental psychologism, and looks for a deeper ground for the existence of the transcendental ego.

His argument is this.<sup>21</sup> Any experience requires both particular intuitions and general concepts. There can be no experience which does not involve the recognition of particular items as being of such and such a kind. It must then be possible to distinguish, in any experience, a "component of recognition, or judgement, which is not identical with, or wholly absorbed by, the particular item which is recognized, which forms the topic of judgement".<sup>22</sup> But this essential recognitional component can be present in experience only because it is possible to refer different experiences to one identical subject. What this possibility of the self-ascription of experiences itself implies then follows:

The minimum implied is that some at least of the concepts under which particular experienced items are recognized as falling should be such that the experiences themselves contain the basis for certain allied distinctions: individually the distinction of a subjective component within a judgement of experience ...; collectively, the distinction between the subjective order and arrangement of a series of such experiences on the one hand and the objective order and arrangement of the items of which they are experiences on the other.<sup>23</sup>

The difficulty with this argument is that the reference to a subject, to which experiences can be ascribed, seems entirely idle. Indeed Strawson himself recognises this in the following passage:

The necessity of saving the recognitional component in an experience from absorption into its sensible accusative (and thereby saving the status of the experience as experience) is simply identical with the necessity of providing room, in experience, for the thought of experience itself; and it is just this necessity which calls directly for the distinction between how things are and how they are experienced as being and hence for the employment, in judgements of experience (though not in every such judgement) of concepts of the objective.<sup>24</sup>

In this reformulation of the argument, reference to empirical self-consciousness of a subject is short-circuited. What remains is what Strawson calls "the necessary self-reflexiveness of experience"; that is, the possibility of providing room within experience for the thought of experience itself.<sup>25</sup> Strawson allows himself to call this necessary self-reflexiveness "transcendental self-consciousness",<sup>26</sup> but it is clear that no self is required here at all. As Zemach has pointed out,<sup>27</sup> all we need to establish Strawson's point is the following:

1. An item: a
2. An experience of recognition of a as an X : b
3. The reflective recognition that b is an experience of a as an X : c

a, b, and c together provide for the necessary self-reflexiveness of experience without any recourse to any kind of self, to which experiences are to be referred. It seems that the argument of Kant's Analytic (and of Strawson's revised version) cannot succeed in providing a backing for the principles of natural light advanced by Descartes. We still have no justification for the claim that thoughts or experiences must be referred to a subject.

In looking back over these moments in philosophical time, it seems clear that the issue of the existence of the subject has not been satisfactorily dealt with. It is hard not to have sympathy with adherents of the theory of neutral monism - the theory that, once we accept experience as the only absolute given, then we can have no certain knowledge of anything else. The emphasis then turns towards giving an account of how we come to believe in objects, bodies, selves and worlds, when there is no strict justification in experience for such beliefs. Although I will not be following this theory any further, it is useful to point out that the theory of neutral monism can be understood as recognising what we have seen as a central difficulty in this area. This is the problem of justifying any claim about the existence of a subject, once the concept of thought or experience has been taken for granted. With this lesson in mind, I shall continue the line of argument developed in earlier chapters. Let us see if the examination of the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought can lead to a more satisfying conclusion.

## The Thinking Subject

Before the historical preliminaries above, I mentioned that the argument at the end of Chapter Four had retraced one step in the process of abstraction by which we arrived at the barest concept of thought which would make critical philosophical enquiry possible: namely, the concept of a Platonic, 'third world' thought-content which could be false. That abstract notion was shown to necessarily presuppose the existence of thought in some concrete form, from which the thought-content could be abstracted. Thus we returned to something like the notion of consciousness: either in the form of experiencing, or thinking, or believing. The notion of an abstract thought-content thus presupposes the notion of what is sometimes called an act of consciousness. Perhaps we at least feel more comfortable here, with something like our ordinary notions of thinking and thought. But in order to see if we can move from here to something like our ordinary notion of the thinker of thoughts, we need to pursue further the questions raised in the last section. In this section, I will deal with the central issue of the relationship between thoughts and the subject. We can begin the discussion by asking a question that Heidegger asked of Husserl.

Understanding the epistemological role of the concept of pure consciousness in Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger marked the difference from his own guiding perspective by asking what is the mode of being of this consciousness?<sup>28</sup> We can focus this question on the present discussion by asking what it is that is



reflected on, when that reflection on thought or experience, so essential to the possibility of critical philosophy, occurs. In any thought, there is the content of the thought, and the thinking of it. In an experience, there is the content of the experience, and the experiencing of it. We now need to focus on the latter aspect in each case, the aspect of consciousness itself. But what is there to reflect on here? The problem can be summarised in Sartre's slogan: "consciousness is nothing".<sup>29</sup>

McGinn elaborates on this in the following passage:

There is .... a way in which consciousness is elusive even to acquaintance, as an exercise in introspection will reveal. Consider your consciousness of some item - an external object, your own body, a sensation - and try to focus attention on that relation: as many philosophers have observed, this relation of consciousness to its objects is peculiarly impalpable and diaphanous - all you come across in introspection are the objects of consciousness, not consciousness itself. This feature of consciousness has induced some thinkers to describe consciousness as a kind of inner emptiness; it is nothing per se but a pure directedness on to things other than itself. No wonder then that it is hard to say what consciousness intrinsically is.<sup>30</sup>

If consciousness is a sort of "inner emptiness", then how are we to ascribe any ontological status to it? Leading on from that question is another. The reflective awareness of thought is essential for the possibility of the concept of thought. But if consciousness is nothing in itself, then how is reflection on the thinking possible? Let us look at these difficulties first in the case of experience, and then in the case of thought.

Talking of an experience we can describe the noematic <sup>31</sup> aspect; what the experience is, intentionally, of. Suppose that the experience is, intentionally, of a box with a back side (hidden from view), an inside (with matches), a bottom, and so forth.

Thus the phenomenological description advocated by Husserl begins. But let us now look towards the noetic aspect of the experience, correlated with the noematic to provide, as Husserl has it, the unity of the pure experience. Here we are to consider not the object (intentionally) experienced, but rather the experiencing itself. Now there are different modes of this experiencing. The same box can be, intentionally, perceived, remembered or fantasised, for example; and we can begin the noetic side of the phenomenological account of the experience. But what is this experiencing - so clearly an essential aspect of the total experience - in itself? What does it consist in? What grasp of it is available to us? Let us look at some alternatives. Could the experiencing itself be understood as an object or content of experience, or as any structure or arrangement of such contents? No, for such an understanding leaves out precisely what is essential to it: that it is the (putative) awareness, or consciousness of objects, the intentional direction towards them. Without this cognitive aspect, the critical concept of experience could not serve as an epistemological alternative to naive realism. But what else is there to point to? When we restrict ourselves to a report of experience itself, foregoing any claims concerning the actual existence of its intentional objects, nothing changes. There is no 'more' to experience, no semi-transparent container of the contents, no ray of light beaming down on the intentional object: such notions are very merely metaphorical, and cannot provide the grasp we need. How then is reflective awareness

of experience possible, when there appears to be a nothingness at its very heart? We can reflect on the intentional objects of experience, the experienced; but a grasp of experiencing itself, and so of the experience as a whole, seems to elude us.

One response to this problem is to say that it arises only because we have arrived at our notion of experience by a process of reification. Instead of talking of experiences, we should talk of how things are experienced, in an adverbial manner. After all, this way of talking is all that is required for the contrast with how things are. The difficulty with this suggestion is that it leaves unanswered the question as to what such experiencing consists in, of how we are to understand its ontological status, and so merely transposes the question into a slightly different key. Having looked at the question in relation to the concept of experience, let us return to the concept of thought.

Essentially the same problem confronts us when we consider the critical concept of thought. For while we may grasp the content of the thought - for example the thought that a Chinese Zelkora would look well in this garden - we have not as yet made clear how we are to grasp the thinking of this content. As with experience, there is no 'more' to the total thought than its content, so in what does the thinking of it consist? Again, what is essential here is, as it were, the cognitive appropriation of the content. Without this we have at most the abstract

thought-content, and not that actual belief which, as was argued in the previous chapter, is a necessary condition of the possibility of a non-conceptual registration of cognitive breakdown, which can in turn be reflectively analysed in terms of how things are thought to be differing from how they are. This thinking, or believing, is no thing, in itself, so how can we grasp its ontological status? If consciousness is, in itself, nothing, then how is reflection on thought, or experience, possible?

The answer can lie only in our recognition of a lack of ontological self-sufficiency here. As thinking and experiencing are, in themselves, no objects upon which we can reflect, they can be reflected on only as ontologically dependent, as attributes or modifications, on something else. There is no other way in which we can account for the possibility of that reflective awareness of thought, required for the critical concept of thought to be possible. We can call this 'something else', to which a thought or experience must, in Hume's words, "be referred", the "subject". At this stage, none of the usual connotations of this term are available. Nevertheless, the way in which reference to the subject of thought, or experience, has arisen, now allows us to say something about its necessary features.

For if the possibility of the critical concepts of thought, or experience, requires a reflective awareness of thought, or experience; and if such awareness is in turn possible only if the thought or experience is referred to a subject, upon which it is ontologically dependent; then an understanding of that subject is presupposed by that reflective awareness, and so, in

turn, by the concepts of thought or reality themselves.

This means that the subject cannot be primarily understood in terms of the critical concepts of experience, or thought. For example, the primary understanding of the subject cannot be of it as that which thinks, or experiences, since this employs the very concept of thought, or experience, which the grasp of the subject is to help make possible. The grasp of that subject, reference to which makes reflection on thought or experience possible, must be independent of the critical concepts of thought and experience, and cannot be in any way reduced to their terms. In this way, we can see that we are forced beyond the limits of thought or experience in another direction. Not only must there be an independent reality of which there is thought or experience; there must also be a subject which 'has' the thought or experience. In each case the presupposition of the existence of something other than experience, or thought, is immune from critical revision, since it is what makes such revision possible.

This argument therefore concludes that there must be a subject to which thoughts are referred, by refusing to take the concept of thought for granted, and by investigating the necessary conditions of its possibility. The argument thereby provides us with a justification of those principles of natural light, or of that immediate intellectual intuition, engaged in by Descartes and Husserl. We could not have even the concept of thought, without the existence of a subject which 'has' those thoughts of which we can become reflectively aware. We have thus retraced a second step in the process of abstraction which took us, in Chapter Four,

to the concept of a pure thought content. We now have the concept of thought as the content of concrete thinking, and as the content of the thinking of a subject.

Having established the existence of a subject, we still need to be clearer on the sense in which the subject 'has' its thoughts. Let us look at this issue by considering a familiar, though inadequate, way of construing the relationship between the subject and its thoughts. This construal sees that relationship along the lines of some kind of property relationship: that is, we have a grasp of the thought, a grasp of the subject, and then try to join them together. But such a construal presupposes precisely the possibility of an independent grasp of thought which we have seen not to be possible. We cannot understand this relationship as a juxtaposition (no matter how subtle) of two essentially independent factors. We need instead to keep to our recognition of the ontological inadequacy of thought, and to see that to speak of a thought is to reify a mode of the subject's existence. Thus rather than say that the subject has a thought, this ontological dependence would be more clearly expressed in talking of the subject thinking. If there is a distinction between how things are and how they are thought to be, the latter must be primarily grasped in terms of how a subject thinks them to be.

If this picture of the relationship which a subject has with its thoughts is adequate, it also brings with it difficulties. We can formulate one of these as follows. The reflective awareness of thought which is required for the critical concept of thought

to be possible, presupposes an understanding of the subject. But as we have seen, this grasp of the subject cannot just be added on to an independent grasp of the thought. Our grasp of the subject must already be of the subject as thinking. But if such an understanding is already presupposed by that reflective awareness of thought required for the possibility of the critical concept of thought, then have we not trapped ourselves in a circle? Are we not in a position where the concept of thought is possible only if there is already a grasp of a subject thinking, and so already a concept of thought? This is, fortunately, not the case. For there are two distinct issues here. One issue concerns the possibility of that specifically critical concept of thought - essential to any critical inquiry - which requires reflection on cognitive breakdown, and which was discussed in Chapter Four. This critical concept of thought also, however, presupposes an understanding of the subject as thinking. Now the concept of thinking involved here need not be the critical concept: it may be only the naive, pre-critical concept of thinking, such that the question of its truth or falsity cannot yet be asked. The second issue, the one with which we are dealing here, concerns the possibility of the concept (critical or pre-critical) of thinking in regard of the ontological inadequacy at the heart of consciousness. So, while the critical reflection on how things are thought to be as failing to match up with reality presupposes a grasp of the thinking subject, this grasp of the subject's thinking may be such that the question of its truth or falsity

cannot be asked. The critical reflection on breakdown of cognitive harmony into error results in the recognition that what is thought may be false, and so gives rise to the specifically critical concept of thought necessary for all critical inquiry. The critical concept of thought therefore presupposes the understanding of the subject as thinking, but only where this understanding of thinking is at the naive pre-critical level. We are not, then, drawn into a vicious circle. Breakdown of cognitive harmony makes possible the advance from the naive pre-critical concept of thought, to the critical concept of thought required for critical philosophical inquiry. The critical concept of thought presupposes only the pre-critical understanding of the subject as thinking. Even so, if we have succeeded in clearing up this difficulty, it seems only to highlight a further one.

Earlier in this chapter, it was argued that even if we trace any reification of thought or experience back to its foundation in the adverbial grasp of how things are thought to be, or experienced as being, we are still no clearer as to what such thinking or experiencing consists in. This argument now returns. For given that critical reflection on thought presupposes an understanding of the subject thinking, how, given the discussion of the nothingness which seems to lie at the heart of consciousness, is such understanding possible? Not only do we need to refer thinking to a subject, as a mode of its existence; we need to understand what sort of mode of its existence this thinking is. One can imagine a certain exasperation here. One might say



"I understand what thinking is. Here, now, I am thinking. This is a 'subject' thinking". Of course, the point here is not to deny this, but to try and make clear what this understanding is; and given the impossibility of locating a thing, or an object, which thinking could consist in, internal ostension is hardly viable. Even pointing to oneself and saying "This is a subject thinking" cannot help, for it is no clearer in what aspect of the subject's existence its thinking is supposed to exist. Internal ostension can succeed in its reference, only if the concept of thinking is already presupposed. Without this presupposition, there is nothing there to be ostended. Internal ostension cannot, then, provide the basis for an account of the possibility of the concept of thought.

We cannot gain the required understanding of thinking by a direct apprehension of cases of 'pure' (that is, unembodied) thinking. For of itself the thinking of a thought presents nothing for such an apprehension to focus on. Thus although the necessary conceptual structure of thought has been much discussed in earlier chapters, we seem to have little idea as to what the actual thinking of the thought amounts to; and so even less idea as to how an understanding of the subject, as involved in such activity, is possible.<sup>32</sup> Let us turn to consider this issue in more detail in the next section.

## Thought and Speech

Let us consider a path out of these difficulties, and towards an understanding of what thinking consists in. The 'semantic' link with instances of thought, which is to provide the critical concept of thought with its 'meaning', requires an awareness of instances of thought, so that they can be brought under the concept. This awareness of thought as possibly false can occur originally only in the context of reflective analysis of a breakdown in cognitive harmony. This awareness itself presupposes an understanding of the subject as thinking - where thinking is here understood in naive fashion, such that the question of its truth or falsity cannot be asked. But the thinking of a thought, like the experiencing of the content of an experience, offers of itself nothing which could serve as the object of such an awareness. How, then, is the understanding of the subject as thinking possible, when there seems to be no possibility for an awareness of the thinking itself? The reply must be as follows. The subject can be understood as thinking only on this condition: the subject must be grasped in a mode of its existence in which thinking is, as it were, embodied. This embodiment of thinking can then provide a foundation for abstraction to the thinking, or consciousness, itself - so enabling us to get a grip on what otherwise seems an elusive phantom. But this immediately raises the question of what sort of mode of the subject's existence can satisfactorily embody thinking? Let us look at some suggestions.

Two suggestions as to the mode of embodiment of thinking quickly present themselves. The first is that thinking is

embodied in specifically linguistic behaviour, in speech.

I shall argue that the primary understanding of the subject as thinking necessarily presupposes an understanding of the subject as speaking. It is speech alone which can provide the embodiment we require at this stage in our strategy.

This is a strong claim, and one which conflicts with how many people spontaneously respond to this issue. They would say, for example, that we frequently ascribe thoughts to people, or even animals, on the basis of non-linguistic behaviour alone. Indeed, they might continue, such ascriptions are often better founded than ascriptions of thought based only on linguistic behaviour. Surely then, the response concludes, thoughts are embodied in non-linguistic behaviour, and we can understand the subject as thinking on the basis of an understanding of the subject's non-linguistic behaviour. Despite the *prima facie* plausibility of this claim, I now have to argue that it cannot provide us with an adequate account of how the understanding of the subject as thinking is possible.

Consider the situation: we are looking for a mode of existence of the subject in which thinking is embodied. This embodiment needs to be such as to allow abstraction from it to the thinking itself (and, thence, to the abstract content of such thinking). In thus abstracting from the embodiment of thinking, we will be stripping off, as it were, the material clothing of the thinking. Nothing can be generated in this process, only the thinking abstracted from its material dress. This is an important point. For if it is well made, then any

formal properties possessed by the (disembodied) thinking of the thought must also be possessed by that mode of the subject's existence from which abstraction is made. If this were not the case, so that the thinking possessed properties which were not present in its materially embodied form, then it would have to be the case that certain properties were generated merely by abstracting from the materiality of that embodiment. But mere abstraction from the materiality of embodiment - the process of taking away the material 'clothing' of thinking - cannot positively generate properties in this way. Perhaps we can be clearer on this point if we look at what sort of properties are important here. In particular, in thinking a thought the subject must at least implicitly be making a claim about how things are in the world: a claim which may be true or false. This much is required to lay the basis for the move to the critical concept of thought. This property of being true or false cannot be generated by abstracting from the materiality of the embodiment of thinking. It must be a property already present in the embodiment of thinking. This means that the mode of the subject's existence from which, by abstraction from the material of its embodiment, we arrive at the bare thinking - must itself be a making of a claim about how things are in the world: a claim which may be either true or false. The mere abstraction from the matter in which thinking is embodied can in no way generate this capacity for truth or falsity. This capacity can only be already present in that mode of the subject's existence in which thinking is embodied. What consequences does this remark have for the two suggestions first offered for the mode of embodiment of the subject's thinking?

Clearly, in speaking, a subject may be making a, possibly false, claim about how things are in the world. That is, the speech may already embody the formal properties of a thought such that, by abstracting from the materiality of the speech, we can arrive at the notion of the bare thinking, or consciousness, itself. Although our ordinary everyday notion of speech will do here, we must note that the present philosophical strategy requires only such embodiment of thinking as makes possible reflective awareness of thinking. This implies that any mode of existence which can embody the formal properties of thinking will serve. Sign languages and semaphore, as well as the written and spoken word, can fulfil the strategic role of embodying thinking. However, not all behaviour will fill the bill here, and our other original suggestion - that non-linguistic behaviour, on the basis of which we normally ascribe thoughts to the subject, can provide the foundation for our primary understanding of the subject as thinking - is inadequate. Such non-linguistic behaviour does not possess the formal properties which are required if it is to function as the embodiment of thinking. Let us see this by looking at an example. From the vantage-point of already possessing the concept of thinking, we can use observations of behaviour to provide the basis for our ascriptions of thoughts and beliefs to the subject in question. We may ascribe to a subject the belief that the front door is locked, on observing the subject arriving and inserting a key into the lock. Even so, this sort of behaviour cannot provide us with the primary understanding of the subject as thinking. Although that belief in a sense informs

that behaviour (at least in that, to account for the behaviour, we ascribe the belief to the subject), the behaviour does not itself make a claim about how things are, which could turn out to be false. Once we have the concept of thinking, we can render non-linguistic behaviour explicitly intelligible by ascribing thoughts or beliefs to the agent. On observing the behaviour of the person introduced above, we could say "She thinks that the door is locked" - thus making sense of her looking for her key, etcetera. But we can do this only when already in possession of the concept of thinking. The non-linguistic behaviour does not itself constitute a true-or-false claim about how things are with the world: we cannot, then, get to the concept of thinking by abstracting from the materiality of this non-linguistic behaviour. Only when we have obtained the concept of thinking from elsewhere, can we say that someone's non-linguistic behaviour in some sense 'embodies' their thinking. So although we ordinarily use our observations of non-linguistic behaviour as a basis for ascribing thoughts to people (and others), that behaviour does not in general possess the formal properties which would make possible the abstraction from the behaviour to the primary understanding of the thinking which it embodies. The primary understanding of the subject as thinking must be of the subject as speaking. Only by subsequent abstraction from the materiality of speech can we then arrive at the concept of bare thought (and thence, at the concept of an abstract thought-content). Thinking, by virtue of the ontological inadequacy at its heart, must be primarily understood as the thinking of a speaking subject.

In arriving at this conclusion, we have in effect retraced a third step of the process of abstraction undertaken in Chapter Four, which resulted in the concept of a pure, abstract thought-content. We now have the notion of thought-content, as the content of concrete thinking on the part of a speaking subject. The argument has proceeded by tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, which is in turn essential to the possibility of any critical philosophical inquiry. If the argument succeeds, it establishes at least the existence of speaking subjects, and a certain priority among the concepts of thought and speech. But the issues surrounding the concepts of thought, language and behaviour are complicated and controversial. I shall take the chance to expand a little on these, and to clarify somewhat the structure of priorities at work in the argument.

#### Thinking and Speaking: Priorities

In the discussion of the last section, I seem to claim a certain kind of priority for speech over thought. In the light of current philosophical discussions this claim needs clarification. In this section I want to begin to discuss some of the questions raised in those discussions, and then to relate them to the argument of the previous section. I will raise three questions in this section. Each of them deals with an aspect of the relationship between thought and language. Let me first say something to introduce this topic.

Donald Davidson, in addressing himself to the issue of the connection between thought and language, considers that neither has conceptual priority. He feels that the dependence of speaking on thinking is evident - "for to speak is to express thoughts". He then aims to balance the equation by showing "that a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another", whilst denying that this imputes any priority to language.<sup>33</sup> Let us begin not by discussing Davidson's own arguments directly, but by looking at how the kind of relation between thought and language which is implied by the line of argument we have so far followed.

To begin with, we assigned to the critical concept of thought a certain strategic priority. That is, in order to develop a philosophical theory immune to criticism, we began with the critical concept of thought as essential to all critical inquiry. By tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of this concept, we were able to establish these conditions as necessary presuppositions of critical inquiry, and hence as proof against any sceptical questioning of them. In the present chapter, I have argued that a necessary condition of the possibility of even the naive, uncritical concept of thought (and so, a fortiori, of the critical concept of thought), is the understanding of a subject as speaking. It would seem clear that this understanding of the subject as speaking in turn requires at least the implicit concept of speech.<sup>34</sup> It might now seem as if the position outlined at least leaves space for the claim that the dependence of the concept of thought on the concept of speech is mutual; that is, that the



concept of speech itself presupposes, as a necessary condition of its possibility, the concept of thought. I have, however, already argued that this is not the case; but that the concept of thought is logically posterior to that of speech, and obtainable only as the result of a process of abstraction. The primary understanding of the subject as speaking cannot be of the subject as expressing or embodying its thoughts, since this would employ the concept of thought which that understanding is to help make possible. The line of development of the philosophical strategy reverses the line of original conceptual development here. Thus although the philosophical strategy we are following begins with the critical concept of thought and works back to the concept of its embodiment in speech, in the line of development of understanding, the concept of speech is necessarily prior to that of thought. Thus the primary grasp of the subject as speaking must be independent of, and irreducible to, the concept of thought. If this argument is to be convincing, it will now have to answer some awkward questions. Does the argument imply that there can be speech without thought? Or that there can be no thought without speech? What would thought consist in, in the absence of speech? These are the questions with which this section is concerned.

Let us begin with the first question. Does the framework of conceptual priorities I have outlined above mean that there can be speech without thought? Surely, it may be argued, if we have reason to believe that a creature cannot think, then we have sufficient reason to deny that it can speak. Parrots are normally excluded from the linguistic community. Furthermore,

speech has been introduced in my own argument as the embodiment of thought, with no hint that we can find speech without it. Both these points are sound, and I have no wish to deny that where there is speech, there is thought. However, this in no way affects the question of the logical priority of the concept of speech over the concept of thought, as described above. Once we possess both concepts, we can say, rightly, that speech requires thought; that if a being cannot think, it cannot speak; and so on. But this tells us nothing about which concept has logical priority. It in no way conflicts with the view that we can have the concept of speech without the concept of thought (though if we do have the concept of thought it may help us to elucidate the former concept, and to draw out some of its implications and limitations). When in possession of both concepts, we are in a position to say that speech is the expression of thoughts; but this achievement should not stop us recognising that our primary grasp of the subject as speaking is, and must be, independent of and prior to the concept of thought. The logical priorities which, I have argued, obtain between the concepts of speech and thought, do not then imply that there can be speech without thought. They do imply that without the concept of speech there could not be the concept of thought; and also that there is room for the notion of a being which has the concept of speech, but not the concept of thought, and so is incapable of recognising that there can be no speech without thought. Once such a being acquires the concept of thought, as that which is embodied in speech, it is in a position to recognise

that there cannot be speech without thoughts which are embodied therein. But this is not to say anything which conflicts with what I have argued about the priorities which obtain between the concepts themselves. Perhaps we can best express the position like this. Speech necessarily requires thought. This answers our first question. The converse - thought necessarily requires speech - is the topic of our second question, and has not yet been discussed. The concept of thought necessarily requires the concept of speech: the converse - the concept of speech necessarily requires the concept of thought - does not obtain. Although the first question has been answered, the set of conceptual priorities just described leads to complications with the second question.

The second question is now more awkward. For we must be concerned with the relationship between the set of conceptual priorities I have outlined above, and the question of whether there can be thought without speech. If thinking is primarily grasped only by abstraction from speaking, so that thinking is primarily grasped as the thinking of a speaking subject, does this not rule out the possibility of thought without speech? And if so, what are we to say about the babies and animals to which thought and belief is so frequently ascribed? A traditional response to the idea of thought without speech is the change of anthropomorphism, but this has often seemed inadequate without the backing of some general account of the relation between thought and language. Let me begin the discussion by spelling out further the obstacles my argument has set for me.

We often ascribe to ourselves and other people - let alone animals - thoughts or beliefs in the absence of their linguistic expression on the part of the subject in question. That is, there are cases in which the concept of thought is applied, where no linguistic embodiment of the thought exists, from which we might abstract the thought itself. How can we justify such applications? One view is that such cases are instances of internal speech, of the subject silently talking things over: but this will not do.<sup>35</sup> For there are perhaps even more occasions when we ascribe thoughts or beliefs in the absence of the appropriate internal verbalisation. But these ordinary ascriptions seem to come into conflict with the argument of the present chapter. If our grasp of the subject as thinking must be primarily based on an understanding of the subject as speaking, then what room is there for the claim that there can be thought without speech? To be able to get anywhere with this question, we need to discuss a third question to which it naturally leads.

The third question arises like this: If we have to find some way of accounting for our everyday ascriptions of thoughts and beliefs in the absence of their linguistic manifestation, then we need to have an answer to the question of what thought consists in, in the absence of speech. So far, it might seem that the argument of the present chapter leads naturally to the view that thinking is just that which speech embodies. But this cannot be a fully adequate account. For if we take away the material embodiment provided by speech for thought, what remains? Are we not left with that 'emptiness', or 'nothingness' which

seemed earlier to characterise consciousness? What, then, are we doing when we ascribe thoughts in the absence of speech; and what does thought consist in? I suggest that, in order to approach these questions, we look closer at the process of abstraction of the concept of thought from that of speech, and at the concept of thought which results. I will undertake this investigation in the next section, and then return to see how its conclusions help us tackle the issues raised here.

### The Abstraction of Thought from Speech

In this section I want to carry on the investigation of the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought. Having shown that the concept of thought is possible only by abstraction from an understanding of a subject as speaking, I want to look at the necessary conditions of that abstraction. This will tell us more about the conditions under which the critical concept of thought is possible. It will also suggest a foundation for an account of the nature of thought, with which to approach the questions raised in the previous section. Recall briefly the context in which this investigation is to be undertaken.

The critical concept of thought is possible - it gets its 'meaning' - only by virtue of a 'semantic' link with instances of error in which thought and reality fail to match up. The primary grasp of error cannot be in terms of the concepts of thought and reality, but must take the form of a non-conceptual registration of a breakdown in an unquestioned cognitive harmony. Reflection on this breakdown makes possible the critical concept of thought (as possibly diverging from reality), which emerges

as the means by which the non-conceptual registration of breakdown is articulated, and by which the breakdown itself analysed (as a coming apart of thought and reality). For the non-conceptual registration of that breakdown to be possible, the thought which (as the subsequent reflective analysis of the breakdown will show) fails to match up with reality, cannot be understood as a purely abstract Platonic thought-content: it must be grasped as the content of actual thinking. The reflective awareness of how things are thought to be thus requires a reflective awareness of actual thinking. This awareness is in turn possible only if that thinking is understood as the thinking of a thinking subject. This understanding of the subject as thinking, which is presupposed by the critical concept of thought, must involve only the naive, uncritical understanding of thinking: an understanding according to which the question of the truth or falsity of what is thought cannot yet be asked. Even so, this naive understanding of the subject as thinking itself necessarily presupposes an understanding of the subject as speaking. The role played by speech in this philosophical strategy is that of overcoming the ontological inadequacy at the heart of the consciousness, by giving it material embodiment. It is against the backdrop of this argument, that the question to which the present section is addressed follows. Given the required understanding of the subject as speaking, how is the understanding of the subject as thinking, as existing in a mode which is embodied in speech, possible? How is the distinction of thought from speech possible? How does it come about? Let us look at a first approach to these questions. Although inadequate, its failure should help us to a clearer understanding of the problem that faces us.

This approach bases itself straightforwardly on the strategic requirements which led to the introduction of speech as the embodiment of thinking. The idea proposed by this approach is simple enough. It is that, to arrive at the concept of thinking, all we need to do is strip off the materiality of that embodiment, the 'clothing' that speech is to provide, and focus our attention on what remains. The problem with this idea, however, is that if, from an occurrence of a subject speaking, we subtract the speech, then we have nothing left - except perhaps the curious mouth-movements of the subject in question. But how else, if this approach fails, are we to go about the task? And why is it that this apparently straightforward approach is inadequate? What is at work in this first approach is the tacit assumption that we can already distinguish the materiality of the speech - that by means of which embodiment is effected - from that which it embodies: the thinking itself. Having made the distinction, the approach moves on to focus on that which abstraction from the materiality of speech leaves untouched. The problem here is that to distinguish, within speech, that which does the embodying and that which is embodied, already presupposes the concept of thinking. A grasp of that which does the embodying presupposes a grasp of that (the thinking) which is embodied; and vice versa. We cannot grasp the materiality of speech independently of a grasp of that which the material 'clothes'. Now we, as ordinary adults (let alone philosophers) who have gone through the process of acquiring the relevant concepts, are equipped to make that distinction. But for someone who has not undergone that process, these concepts and that distinction are

unavailable. The distinction, within speech, of that which is embodied and that which embodies, cannot be used in an account of the possibility of the concept of thinking: it already presupposes the concept. Without being able to make this distinction within speech, the process of abstracting from the speech of the subject can leave us contemplating only the subject as not speaking. It cannot make possible the concept of thinking. But if this is so, then how is the concept of thinking possible at all? How, from an understanding of the subject as speaking, is an understanding of the subject as thinking delivered up?

The argument which follows has a structure similar in important respects to that of the arguments concerning the distinctions between experience and reality, and thought and reality. It shows again that a certain negativity is required for a particular concept to be possible. It will conclude that the concept of thinking is possible, only in the context of reflection on situations in which that which is embodied in speech fails to match up with that which does the embodying. Consider. Speaking from our own conceptual vantage-point, - already possessing the concepts of thinking, and of that which embodies it in speech<sup>36.</sup> - we can say the following about the conditions under which those concepts are possible. Insofar as the thinking is adequately embodied, or expressed, in the speech, there is no possibility of the concept of thinking emerging. As we have seen, it cannot be gained by direct apprehension of examples of it, or by trying to strip off the materiality of speech to reveal the thinking beneath. Nevertheless, the discussion in the preceding



paragraph indicated a certain conceptual interdependence which it is as well to examine further. We could not have the concept of thinking (as that which is embodied in the speech) by itself. To grasp thinking as that which is embodied in the speech is possible only on condition of an understanding of the means of its embodiment, of the materiality of speech. For to distinguish within speech that which is embodied in it, requires a grasp of that from which, within the context of the speech, it is distinguished; namely, that which does the embodying. A grasp of that which is expressed in speech requires a grasp of that which expresses it, and vice versa. But how is this conceptual pair possible? Neither concept can be established independently of the other. Nor can thinking be understood merely in terms of the concept of the material in which it is embodied; that is, understood as that which the materiality of speech embodies. Nor can the understanding of the materiality of speech be in terms of the thinking itself; that is, as that which embodies the thinking. Both of these attempts provide us with no more than a sterile circularity. What, then, are we to do?

We have seen situations like this before. In trying to account for the possibility of the conceptual pairs 'experience'/'reality' and 'thought'/'reality', the same difficulty arose.<sup>37</sup> In each of those situations we were dealing with the possibility of an interdependent pair of concepts. Neither concept could be established independently of the other. Nor could either concept be grasped merely in terms of the other, since this

would result in a sterile circle, rather than an adequate account of the possibility of the concepts. But each concept was possible only on condition that there was a 'semantic' link with something other than the concepts themselves - an 'extra-conceptual realm' - which provided the concept with its 'meaning', or 'content'. In each of those situations, the concepts could be 'semantically' linked with a 'meaning - giving' extra-conceptual realm only as a pair. The concepts had to be linked, as a pair, with instances where how things are thought to be, or are experienced as being, was already related to how things are. For the distinction between the concepts in each case to be possible, this relationship had to be one of a certain lack of fit. The instances had to be instances of error, in which thought or experience failed to match up with reality. How can this reflection on those arguments help us in the present discussion?

The present case presents us with a similar structure. If the concepts of thinking (that which is articulated in the speech) and the materiality of speech (that which, in the speech, does the articulating), are to be possible, then they must be 'semantically' linked to an aspect of an extra-conceptual realm, within which that which articulates, and that which is articulated, are already related. Suppose, now, that that which is articulated is perfectly matched by that which articulates it. (We could formulate this in Saussure's terms, by supposing that the signifier matches the signified.)<sup>38</sup> If we suppose this, then no distinction between the thinking, and that which expresses,

embodies or articulates it in speech, will be possible. The distinction, and so the concepts at issue, will be possible only where the situation breaks down to reveal a divergence between that which is articulated, and that which articulates it: that is, where the expression in speech fails to match the thinking (or the signifier the signified). Without such a divergence within speech, there is no possibility of an understanding of the subject as thinking (and no possibility of the critical concept of thought, and so on). As is the case with the critical concepts of thought and experience, the concepts at issue here - of thinking and its embodiment - are possible only in the context of reflection on a breakdown or rupture in the smooth running of the subject's affairs. In this area we can learn only from our mistakes. Again, we are led to the melancholy view that conceptual progress depends not on a synthetic construction of concepts on the basis of what is positively present to us, but rather on analysis of our negative moments, on reflection on our failures. Let us have a closer look at whether there are alternatives to that view.

In the present context we can test the view that conceptual progress depends on a reflection on breakdown, by examining an alternative to the above explanation of how the concept of thinking is possible. For surely, it may be suggested, there are many cases in our own language where two or more expressions will articulate our thinking equally well. Can we not, reflecting on this state of affairs, arrive at the concept of the thinking which is thus diversely embodied? As that which remains the

same under its different guises? Let us consider how far this proposal can go towards providing an alternative account of the possibility of the concept of thinking. According to the proposal, we are to arrive at the concept of thinking on the basis of reflecting on a situation in which certain, different, expressions are uttered. These expressions, as we can say from the vantage-point of possessing the requisite concepts, articulate the same thinking. But the question we have to consider, is how someone without the concept of thinking could come to acquire it through reflection on these utterances. Let us look at some suggestions, as to how this can be accomplished, which are in line with the proposal under consideration. First: could that reflection take the form of a direct apprehension of the thinking, coupled with an awareness of the embodiments it receives from different expressions? The answer must be no, since it has already been shown that such a direct apprehension of thinking is not possible without already presupposing the availability of the concept of thinking: if it were, we would not be faced with the present problem. Second: could it be that the utterances are made in similar situations, so that it is possible to recognise that they embody the same thinking? Again, the answer is no, for however similar situations may be, people's thinking about them may be different. Further, many different utterances, with different meanings, can be made in similar situations. Without a direct apprehension of the sameness of the thinking which is expressed - which apprehension we have already ruled out - this suggestion cannot work. Third: could there be a realisation on the part of the subject that, in

a certain situation, it could have uttered 'X', instead of 'Y', with equivalent expressive effect? So that a reflection on the linguistic possibilities available leads to a reflection on the thinking which could be diversely embodied? Let us look at this suggestion further. The recognition of the possibility of using either of two expressions cannot be based here on a direct awareness of that which is to be embodied, coupled with a realisation that either of the two expressions would adequately embody it. It has already been argued that such an awareness cannot provide part of an account of the possibility of the concept of thinking, since it already presupposes the availability of that concept. The recognition of the linguistic possibilities is supposed to make possible the concept of thinking, and so cannot be based on it. What, then, does the recognition of the possibility of using either of two (or more) expressions amount to? Of course, in any given situation I can utter whatever expressions I like. The point of "could" in "I could have said 'X' instead of 'Y'", is presumably to claim that either "X" or "Y" would do the job. To take a personal example: the structure of my written sentences is often a consequence of how the thought develops in my mind, rather than a consequence of considering how best to communicate to a reader. I am frequently in a position to say "I could have uttered 'X', instead of 'Y' (and saved the reader unnecessary mental contortions)". Either "X" or "Y" would have done the job of expressing the salient thought. In this example then, the recognition of the possibility of uttering either of two semantically equivalent expressions

presupposes the concept of the thinking which they are to embody. It cannot, therefore, lay the foundation for an account of the possibility of that concept. Let us consider a fourth and final suggestion as to how this proposed alternative account of the possibility of the concept of thinking might be made to work. Consider a case where two members of separate societies with different languages meet for the first time; neither having, up to now, the vaguest suspicion that there might be other societies or other languages. How will they get on? Will they not be forced to a recognition that they have different ways of saying the same thing, articulating the same thinking? Assume that they manage, unsuspectingly, a friendly greeting. One then asks the other where she is going, and incomprehension begins. Now we can imagine that these two gradually learn each other's language, so that each is able to say to members of their own society "Where I say 'X' to you, I would say 'Y' to my friend", or "Where we say 'X', they say 'Y'". We might accept the possibility of recognising a difference in language along these lines, which does not require the concept of thinking: perhaps evidence for this could be provided by bilingual children. But where is the concept of thinking provided for here? What we have is a situation in which people speak appropriately, relative to their audience. The recognition that, while I say "It's raining" to my children, I say "Es regnet" to a German friend, neither necessitates, nor of itself provide for, the concept of thinking. That recognition relates linguistic expressions to situations with different communicators, not linguistic expressions

to the thinking expressed. Can we at least conclude from this example that, if the expressions are used in the same situations, only with different audiences, then the thinking embodied is the same? We can do this only if we already avail ourselves of the concept of thinking. A being which lacks that concept has only the recognition that when talking to certain people you say "It's raining", and when talking to certain others "Es regnet". The concept of the thinking which is embodied by both expressions, is neither necessary for that being's grasp of the situation, nor made possible just by reflecting on it.

In the preceding paragraph we tested the argument to the conclusion that the concept of thinking is possible only by virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations in which there is a lack of fit between the material embodiment of thinking, and the thinking itself (or between the linguistic expression, and the thinking expressed). Other suggestions as to how the concept of thinking could be possible were tried out and rejected. The original argument remains, to that extent, intact. I will now elaborate a bit on its conclusion, in preparation for a discussion of how that argument gives us a foundation for a theory of the relationships between thought, language and behaviour.

The concept of thinking is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with an extra-conceptual realm which gives that concept its 'meaning' or 'content'. This link cannot be with the concept of thinking by itself, but only with the

interdependent pair of concepts "thinking"/"that which embodies thinking". The link must be, at the other end, with a situation in which the thinking, and that which embodies it, are already interrelated. Not only must they be already interrelated, but this relation must be one of a lack of fit. The thinking must diverge from the material of its embodiment. If thinking and its embodiment were perfectly matched, there would be no way of drawing the distinction between the two: we could have the understanding of the subject as speaking, but not the concepts of that which is embodied in the speech, or of the materiality of speech which provides its embodiment. Only where the embodiment does not match the thinking, can the primary grasp of speech split, as it were, to produce the concepts of that which is embodied, and that which is the means of its embodiment. Or, to use the closely parallel terms of Saussure's linguistics, only in this way can the concept of the sign split to produce the concepts of signified and signifier. But how precisely are we to understand this lack of fit between the thinking which is articulated in speech, and the linguistic signifier which articulates it? How can the expression fail to match the thinking?

This lack of fit between thinking and its embodiment in speech can only be a matter of content: of what is said or expressed differing from what is thought. The 'semantic' link is between the pair of concepts "thinking"/"that which embodies thinking", and a situation in which the content of the speech differs from the content of the thinking; so that the expression



does not adequately embody, or articulate, the thinking.

Let us briefly note the parallel here with the argument of Chapter Four. In those chapters it was argued, firstly, that the critical concept of thought is possible only on condition of being 'semantically' linked with situations in which thought and reality are already related. It was argued, secondly, that the concept of thought could emerge from reflection on such situations, only if thought and reality did not match up. In the present section, I have argued, firstly, that the concept of thinking is possible only on condition of being 'semantically' linked with a situation in which thinking is somehow embodied; and secondly, that the concept of thinking can emerge from reflection on such situations only if the thinking and the means of its embodiment fail to match up. The lack of fit between the salient parts of the situations discussed is thus an important aspect of both the present argument, and the argument of Chapter Four. I will argue later that the primary understanding of thinking which this account provides for, is an understanding of thinking as that which can be, and can fail to be, adequately articulated in speech. I intend to explore the implications of this claim in the next chapter. In the present chapter, in the following section, I wish to see how this account of the possibility of the concept of thinking at least leaves room for a plausible theory of the relationships between thinking and language. This theory should avoid some of the problems encountered by rival theories of those relationships, and go some way towards answering the questions left hanging at the end of the previous section.<sup>39</sup>

## The Expression of Thinking

We have looked at some of the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thinking; in particular, its relationship with the materiality of speech which serves to embody it. Let us now focus again on the questions of what thought consists in, and of whether there can be thought without speech. The argument of this chapter up to now, which has dealt with the issue of thinking as embodied, or expressed, in speech, seems to leave room for the following response:

One is tempted to use the following picture: what he really 'wanted to say', what he 'meant' was already present somewhere in his mind even before we gave it expression. 40.

And further:

Now if it were asked: "Do you have the thought before finding the expression?" what would one have to reply? And what, to the question: "What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?" 41.

It may seem, then, that if I want to claim that thinking is embodied in speech, then I am committed to the kind of mentalism which Wittgenstein and others have forcefully criticised. I want to show in this section that I am not so committed, and also to provide a more plausible theory of the relationship of thinking to its expression.

Recall the argument of the previous chapter. The concept of thought is made possible only in the context of reflection on a non-conceptually registered breakdown in a concrete, cognitive harmony. Thought and reality come apart. For this non-conceptual

registration to be possible, that thought cannot be a mere abstract thought-content, but must inform a concrete 'lived' consciousness of reality. In reflecting on how things are thought to be, and dismissing it as false in the light of a (presumed) awareness of how things really are, I need not be reflecting on a thought which is already explicitly articulated in my mind. In the example introduced in Chapter Four, the conscious thought that my bicycle was still outside the library, need never have entered my mind. Nevertheless, the shock, which non-conceptually registered the breakdown in cognitive harmony, makes possible the reflection that that is indeed what I thought: my thinking gains explicit expression only on reflection. If I had not been in a state of a 'lived' consciousness of the world - the content of which awareness could subsequently be explicitly articulated as thinking that my bicycle was outside - then there would be no cognitive breakdown. Let me offer another example to illustrate this point.

A friend of mine returned to her house from work, opened the door, entered, and was dumbstruck. The house was neither untidy, nor dirty. Nothing had been taken. But as far as she could take in, every article in the house had been rearranged. There were artistic arrangements of clothing, food and books in the living room. The bed was upside down, fully made up, and resting on two chests of drawers. It was the unfamiliar arrangement of familiar things which shocked her. There was no question here of her consciously entertaining and accepting the thought-content

that her house would be in the same order as when she left it. Or that the cutlery would be in the cutlery-drawer, instead of forming a sculpture in the fireplace. Such thoughts, as we say, had never entered her head. Even so, her sense of shock non-conceptually registered a breakdown in cognitive harmony. Reflective analysis of the situation brought out the fact that of course she had believed that her house would be ordered as usual. But this belief was not merely an abstract thought-content, nor the object of a conscious entertaining and accepting. It was, rather, the implicit content of a concrete lived awareness of the world. The thinking that is involved in such a case is not the conscious process of considering and accepting a certain abstract thought-content (although we do sometimes engage in this). It is not a mental entity immediately transparent to the philosopher's gaze (as Descartes and Husserl understood the *cogitatio*). It is a pre-articulate consciousness of the world, which informs the subject's concrete practical involvements with that world.<sup>42</sup> Let us now see how far this account of thinking helps us to avoid the pitfalls of mentalism.

On the account just presented, linguistic expression and the thinking which it expresses are not primarily understood as independent entities, so that we have a thought and then look around for linguistic material to embody or express it. Instead, we can understand the relationship between thinking and language as one in which a pre-articulate lived awareness gets articulated in speech. The answer to Wittgenstein's question, is that we do

not, in general, have the thought before finding the expression; but that we are in a state of pre-articulate awareness which may or may not get articulated in language. One way of arriving at the mentalism which Wittgenstein criticises is this. Where a linguistic expression fails to adequately articulate the pre-articulate awareness, or thinking, we are wont to say, in reflecting on the situation, that the expression was the wrong one for the thought. We are thus tempted to use the picture described above by Wittgenstein. But we can and should resist this temptation. This picture emerges naturally from reflection on a situation in which thinking and its expression do not match up. In that reflection we separate out the thought and its expression: I might reflect like this "I said that the cushion was warm, but this was the wrong expression for the thought. I really meant that the cushion was soft". In this reflection we articulate the content of the thinking. This explicitly articulated thought-content is then available for our conscious consideration. We now tend to project this picture, of a consciously entertained thought-content along with a linguistic expression of it, back on to the situation prior to the reflection and then to generalise it. So that we are led always to look for the thought which accompanies linguistic expression. But this projection is illegitimate. It is not necessary for us to say that, prior to my saying that the cushion was warm, I had the thought that the cushion was soft. All we need is a pre-articulate awareness which was inadequately articulated. Indeed, it may only be in reflection on that inadequacy, that

the original pre-articulate awareness gets adequately articulated. It may only be in reflection that that awareness is constituted as an explicit thought. Let me try to relate this account to the question posed at the beginning of this section.

What is thought without speech? The preceding discussion suggests an answer. Thought is not a fully-formed mental entity existing alongside its linguistic expression. Thought is instead, essentially, a state of lived pre-articulate awareness of the world, which may or may not receive linguistic expression. With our linguistic abilities we can articulate many of these states of our concrete cognitive relationship with reality. Dumb animals, however, presumably do not. What are we to say of them? We need not deny them all awareness of reality. On the present account we can understand their awareness as the sort of pre-articulate state which we can articulate in our speech. We can thus allow ourselves to say that certain dumb animals think, but cannot articulate their thinking. That dog, for example, may be in a state of pre-articulate awareness which we would be able to articulate as thinking that the squirrel is up the tree. The dog's inability to articulate its thinking for itself, might restrain us from granting that the dog's awareness is constituted as an articulated thought. Indeed, many people, while accepting that the dog thinks that the squirrel is in the tree, would feel much less comfortable with the idea that the dog has the thought that the squirrel is up the tree, because of the implications this notion carries concerning the ability to articulate thinking.

I do not wish, in using this idea of thinking as primarily a state of pre-articulate awareness, to deny the phenomenon of silent articulate thought - that train of thoughts in the mind, which often seems like an internal discussion. I want to say instead that this phenomenon of 'inner-saying' cannot provide us with an adequate theory of thinking in general.<sup>43</sup> Of course, how we use the term "thinking" can be a matter of personal taste: what is important is that we understand the distinctions which are being made. I would want to claim that the concept of a pre-articulate awareness or consciousness not only plays a significant part in our investigation of the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept of thought, but also helps us to articulate our experiences of cognitive contact with reality, and our experience of expressing our thinking. I do not, by all this, wish to imply that speaking subjects can always articulate such states: we may be unable to articulate our state, and have someone with more experience do it for us, a pattern established to a lesser or greater extent when we are children. We can thus make sense of the feeling that we sometimes cannot find the words to express our thoughts: it is not that we have an articulate thought which just requires the appropriate linguistic clothing, but that we are in a certain state which we cannot articulate satisfactorily at all. (We know the dissatisfaction consequent on trying a formulation which does not quite fit, and the sense of release when an adequate articulation is found.) We have already seen the importance of situations in which there is a lack of fit between thinking and its expression, and I will look at more of

its implications in the next chapter. In this section, I have tried to give a brief idea of how the argument presented earlier in the chapter, concerning the possibility of the concept of thinking, can provide for a plausible account of the relationship between thinking and language. In the next chapter I turn back to the main course of the argument, to examine further the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, and to show how these lay the foundation for non-relativistic ethics.



CHAPTER SIX  
COMMUNICATION

In this chapter, I will argue that one of the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, is that there are speaking subjects engaged in a process of communication. Furthermore, the maintenance of such communication is an action-guiding value, not relative to particular individual aims, needs, preferences and so on. Before presenting the argument, I need to recapitulate briefly some of the argument of the previous two chapters, since it is from that argument that the argument of the present chapter develops.

In those chapters, it was argued that the critical concept of thought is made possible only in a context of reflective analysis of a breakdown in cognitive harmony. This reflection involves the rejection of how things are thought to be, on the basis of a (presumed) awareness of how things really are. The awareness of how things are thought to be, which this reflective process involves, itself necessarily presupposes a grasp of a thinking subject to which the thought is reflectively ascribed. This grasp of the subject as thinking, itself presupposes, as that from which it is abstracted, a grasp of the subject as speaking. The concept of the thinking, which is embodied in speech, is possible only in conjunction with the concept of the means of its embodiment in speech: the linguistic expression. These concepts are possible only in virtue of being 'semantically' linked, as a pair, with speech situations in which thinking and

expression are already related. Further, these situations must be such that there is a distinction between the thinking and the expression at the level of their respective contents; that is, such that the content of the thinking is not matched by the content of the expression.

It is clear that there are structural parallels between the discussion about the possibility of the concept of thinking (that which is related to, but may differ from, its linguistic expression), and the discussion about the possibility of the critical concept of thought (that which is related to, but may differ from, reality) - though these parallels are not as close as the parallels that were seen to hold between the latter discussion, and the discussion about the possibility of the critical concept of experience. Where possible, I will use these parallels to illuminate the argument that follows.

### Thinking and its Expression

Let me now place the concerns of the present chapter in the context of the argument I have summarised above. I will do this by elaborating one of the later stages of that argument. I argued there<sup>1</sup> that the concepts of the thinking embodied in speech, and of the materiality of speech which served to embody that thinking, are interdependent. They can have their 'meaning' only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations in an extra-conceptual realm, in which thinking and its means of embodiment are already related. Furthermore, this relationship

between thinking and its means of embodiment must be such as to permit a distinction to be drawn between the two. Let us now look more closely at this relationship, in terms of its position in the general philosophical strategy I have so far pursued.

In discussing the necessary conditions of the possibility of the concept (critical or precritical) of thinking, it was argued that this concept presupposes an understanding of a subject as speaking. Only in this way could we compensate for the ontological inadequacy, the 'nothingness' that was shown in Chapter Five to characterise thinking. The question then arose as to how, given an understanding of a subject as speaking, the concept of thinking could be derived. How can the concept of thinking be acquired on the basis of an understanding of the subject as speaking? From within speech, we must be able, as it were, to distinguish the thinking which is embodied from the linguistic material by means of which it is embodied. But the distinction to be drawn here cannot be an ontological one, distinguishing the 'nothingness' that characterises thinking, from the material 'substance' of its embodiment: for if we could focus on the 'nothingness' of thinking in this way, the problem would not have arisen in the first place. The distinction to be drawn must be one of content, in the sense that the content of the thinking is distinguished from the content of what is said in uttering the linguistic expression. There now seems to be a tension between two demands. The first demand is that the linguistic expression serve within speech as the material for the embodiment of the thinking: the thinking and its means of

embodiment are thus related within the speech situation. The second demand is that the content of the linguistic expression differ from the content of the thinking. But if this second demand is fulfilled - and if it is not, we will not be able to distinguish thinking from speaking, and so not have the concept of thinking at all - then it must seem as if the linguistic expression does not embody the thinking. For it seems as if, to embody the subject's thinking, the linguistic expression should have the same content as that thinking. How can we accommodate this tension, which arises from the apparent requirement that the linguistic material in speech both embody and not embody the subject's thinking? One approach towards the question of such accommodation would be to avoid the tension by removing one or other of the demands which generate it. To see why this approach cannot work, let us examine both possibilities.

Let us consider first the effects of removing the demand that the linguistic expression and the subject's thinking be related within the speech situation. If we were, for example, to try to account for the possibility of the pair of concepts - thinking/its linguistic expression - by postulating a 'semantic' link with a situation in which the thinking and the linguistic expression were not related, then what would be the result? Take as an example a situation in which I am thinking about going on holiday tomorrow, but am in fact uttering the words of a Latin prayer, the meaning of which I have never known. Now the linguistic expression which I utter does not match up with my

thinking about the holiday. But we can grasp the difference in content between the unrelated thinking and linguistic expression in this case, only if we already possess the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment. If we already have those concepts, then we can straightforwardly compare what I was thinking, with what I was saying, in uttering the linguistic expression: but without these concepts, we cannot make such a comparison, and so cannot grasp the difference. The mere fact that there is a difference, between a linguistic expression and the content of a subject's thinking, cannot of itself make possible the concepts of thinking and its expression. In the absence of the two being related within the situation of speech, a grasp of that difference presupposes those concepts which it was to help make possible.

Let us then reverse the position, and consider the effects of removing the demand that the thinking and the linguistic expression differ in content. Suppose we have a situation in which the subject's thinking and the linguistic expression are related, in that the linguistic expression is the means by which the thinking is embodied in speech, but in which no distinction in content is to be made: the subject says what it thinks. As I have already argued,<sup>2</sup> where the means of embodiment matches the thinking, there is no way of abstracting the concept of thinking from the grasp of the situation. Without a difference at the level of content, no distinction between thinking and its means of embodiment in speech is possible: there is only the grasp of the subject speaking. Where the subject's thinking and the linguistic expression are

related in speech, but are without difference in content, the concept of thinking is not possible. Both ways of trying to put into effect this approach to the tension described above have failed. What alternative approach is there?

I suggest that the tension between the two demands described above - that thinking and its means of embodiment be related within speech and yet differ in content - be accommodated by considering the following. It is clear that we cannot construct the understanding of the type of situation we want, by starting with an understanding of the subject's thinking on one side, an understanding of its linguistic means of embodiment (with a different content) on the other, and then jamming them together. This would presuppose the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment, and so cannot form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. The only alternative is to begin with an understanding of the subject as speaking, and then to distinguish the thinking from the expression by reflecting on situations in which those components come apart from one another. On the basis of an understanding of the subject as speaking (where we, possessing the concepts in question, would say that the expression matches and embodies the thinking), we can get to the concept of thinking, by reflecting on situations where the normal coincidence of thinking and expression does not obtain. The contents of the thinking and the expression differ. But this divergence of thinking and expression from one another cannot be an absolute separation, so that the thinking and the expression have

to be grasped independently of one another: for that would presuppose the very concepts which it is to help make possible. The divergence of thinking and its means of embodiment from one another must be a divergence within the context of the speech situation in which thinking is embodied. What sense can we make of this? We can formulate the relationship, which obtains between thinking and linguistic expression in the situations we are discussing, in this way. We can say that the thinking is that which is to be embodied by means of the expression; and that, correlatively, the expression is that by means of which the thinking is to be embodied in speech. If the thinking were not that which was to be expressed, then the grasp of the situation where the content of thinking differed from that of the linguistic expression could be achieved only by putting together the independent grasp of the thinking, with the independent grasp of the expression. Such an understanding would presuppose the concepts whose possibility is at issue; and cannot therefore form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. The formulation indicates the normal speech situation within which thinking and its means of embodiment are related, and yet provides room for the possibility that, within the speech situation, the linguistic expression may fail to match up with the thinking which it is to embody. The concept of thinking, then, is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with speech situations, which are such that the expression uttered fails to adequately express the thinking. Thus although the understanding of the subject as thinking presupposes an understanding of the subject as speaking (so that thinking possesses, as it were, some ontological substance), the

understanding of the subject as thinking is nevertheless possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link between the concept of thinking, and situations in which the embodiment of thinking has failed.

There is a parallel here with the discussion of the critical concept of thought. That concept was shown to be possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations in which the lack of fit between thought and reality constitutes a failure. It is a failure of how things are thought to be, to match up with that with which it was to match up; namely, with how things really are. That failure was a cognitive failure: what we more usually call error. To maintain the parallel with the discussion of the concept of thinking, I will call those situations in which the linguistic expression fails to match up with the thinking which it is to express, "expressive failures". They are, in brief, situations in which the expression is the wrong one for the thinking which is to be expressed in speech. Unless there were situations of this kind, it would not be possible to distinguish within speech the thinking from the means of its embodiment: the linguistic expression. We can distinguish within speech the thinking which is to be expressed, and the linguistic expression which is to express it, only if there exist situations in which these two aspects fail to match up. I will take up this argument and its implications again, towards the end of this chapter. Its importance for the foundation of ethics will there be indicated. For the present, if this argument works, I need to make a point of clarification.



The point is this: in claiming that the subject's thinking must be related to the linguistic expression, as that by means of which it is to be articulated or expressed, I must be clear that this does not entitle us to ascribe to the subject the intention to get the right expression for the thinking. For such an intention, whether implicit or explicit, would presuppose the concepts at issue here: and if those concepts are possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with cases of expressive failure, then we cannot, in our account of expressive failure, legitimately ascribe the possession of the concepts to the subject prior to that failure. Nevertheless, it is only if the subject's thinking is that which is to be articulated, that the concept of thinking is possible. How are we to make sense of this situation, in which we seem to be describing the subject's behaviour (its utterance of a linguistic expression) as directed towards a certain goal, and yet in which the subject cannot at that point possess the concepts necessary for the articulation of that goal? What sort of account is available to us here?

It is clear that these situations, in which the subject's thinking is that which is to be expressed in speech, are not the kind of situations where we consciously try for the right expression for our thinking, and fail. (As when, for example, we try to say something in a foreign language, or try to articulate our feelings). But it is wrong to see that kind of case as a general model for goal-directed behaviour. To give a complete argument about the necessary conditions of the possibility of

teleological concepts is well beyond the scope of the present inquiry. I shall make instead some remarks to indicate the kind of account of goal-directed behaviour and teleological concepts that would emerge. This account has a structure which parallels in important respects the account of the relationship between thought and language presented in Chapter Five.

The first remark is this: there are cases of behaviour which we spontaneously describe as goal-directed, in the absence of possession by the agent of the concepts which would be required to articulate that goal. Thus animals and babies behave in ways which we describe as goal-directed ("The baby is trying to find the breast", "The dog wants to go out"), without being able to articulate explicitly their goals. Second: I would argue that teleological concepts, such as "goal", "want" and "intention" are possible, only on condition of reflection on situations in which (as we can say, having gone through the process of acquiring those concepts) the subject has failed to achieve its goals. In the absence of reflection on such situations (which we might call instances of practical failure), there is no way of making possible the concepts in question. (As a heuristic exercise, we might try to explain the meaning of any of these terms without referring to such situations.) Third: the temptation to use the mentalistic picture of a conscious act of intention which accompanies all goal-directed behaviour, can be understood along the same lines as the temptation to use the mentalistic picture of the relationship between thought and its expression, which was described by Wittgenstein.<sup>3</sup> Let us look at an example. Having bought a new pair of shoes earlier

in the day, I am walking home in the rain, thinking about what to cook for dinner. Suddenly I slip, and tread in a deep, muddy puddle. My foot and shoe are drenched in mud. I exclaim, and walk on, muttering to myself, "I was trying to keep those shoes smart". What we have here is a case of goal-directed behaviour. I was avoiding puddles, keeping my shoes clean. And yet at no time had I consciously set myself that goal: reflection on my failure to achieve it, leads me to articulate the goal for the first time. The temptation here, is to then project the distinction between the goal and the behaviour backwards, and then to locate the existence of the goal in the mind. The picture is then of a subject with a consciously held goal, who then consciously sets out to act in such a way that that goal be fulfilled. Of course, this sort of thing does often happen: but it is a mistake to see it as an adequate model for goal-directed behaviour in general. What is primarily the case, is that the subject has pre-articulate practical involvements with the world, which can be subsequently articulated using teleological language. We cannot understand the nature of goal-directed behaviour primarily by means of putting together the concept of an intention with the concept of the means of its embodiment in behaviour. These concepts are themselves made possible only in the context of reflection on situations in which goal-directed behaviour has broken down.

I am painfully aware that these three remarks do not constitute a comprehensive account of the issues to which they are addressed. Their purpose is rather to indicate that there is a plausible (non-mentalistic) picture of how we can say that, within a speech

situation, the thinking is that which is to be expressed by means of the linguistic expression; and yet are not committed to ascribing appropriate intentions to the subject. In the following section I will look more closely at cases of failure, of the linguistic expression to fit the thinking which is to be thus expressed.

### Expressive Failure

To recapitulate: the concept of thinking is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations of expressive failure - of getting the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed. Such a link itself necessarily presupposes a grasp of that situation (of expressive failure) with which the concept is to be linked. Without some such already given grasp of expressive failure, there could be no way of a 'semantic' link obtaining between the concepts of thinking and of its means of embodiment, and the relevant aspects of the extra-conceptual realm. Without this link, the concepts cannot possess their required 'meaning': they cannot exist as those concepts at all. I want in this section to examine what sort of grasp, or understanding of situations of expressive failure there can be, such that it makes possible the interdependent pair of concepts in question. The issue here is parallel to the issue of how situations of cognitive failure are to be grasped, so as to make possible the critical concepts of thought and reality.<sup>4</sup>

The problem we are faced with in giving an account of the primary grasp of situations of expressive failure, exactly parallels the problem encountered in accounting for the primary grasp of situations of cognitive failure (error). It is this. From our conceptual vantage-point, as ordinary adults who have acquired the concepts of thinking, and of that by means of which it is expressed in speech, we can grasp situations of expressive failure along these lines. We can grasp them as situations in which the thinking which is to be expressed, is not adequately expressed by the material aspect of speech; by the linguistic expression. Indeed, our philosophical strategy has shown that we require a 'semantic' link with situations in which thinking and its material expression are at odds with one another. But this understanding of situations of expressive failure clearly presupposes the availability of the concepts of thinking and its means of expression: it cannot, then, form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. The primary grasp of situations of expressive failure must take another form. Again, we have a situation in which the line of development of the philosophical strategy reverses the line of primary conceptual development. If the primary grasp of expressive failure cannot employ the concepts which it is to help make possible, then how is such a grasp possible at all? Let us look at some suggestions.

The first suggestion will not take us very far. It is the suggestion that the primary grasp of expressive failure can be synthetically constructed from a grasp of its components, thinking

and its means of expression. The idea behind this suggestion is that the primary grasp of the situation can be a grasp from 'inside'. This suggestion fails, for a familiar reason. To synthesise an understanding of a case of expressive failure from the understanding of its components, already presupposes the availability of the concepts which that understanding of expressive failure is to help make possible. It may now seem, in the light of the failure of this suggestion, that our next move must directly parallel the move made in the discussion of the critical concept of thought: That is, it may seem as if we must now say that the primary grasp of an instance of expressive failure must be of it as a totality, from 'outside'. I will indeed argue a little further on that this is the case. Before doing so, however, I want to consider some other suggestions, which arise from a discussion of how it is possible to get the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed. I will now turn to that discussion.

How can an expression be the wrong one for the thinking which it is to express? If we consider the parallel question, how can thought fail to match up with reality, there seems to be little problem. How things really are is independent of how things are thought to be by the subject, and there seems no good reason to suspect a prearranged harmony between the two. But the case of the expression of the subject's thinking is different. For it is the subject which both thinks, and utters the linguistic expression. If the subject is the source of both thinking and expression, how can it fail to adequately express its thinking? How can it fail to achieve a fit between the content of the thinking, and the content

of the expression uttered? Such a failure can be possible only if the content of the expression (like the content of reality) is independent of the subject. That is, the linguistic expression does not (pace Humpty Dumpty) mean just what the speaker chooses it to mean. If it did, then whatever expression the subject uttered would be right; and as Wittgenstein tells us in a related context "that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'".<sup>5</sup> More important for our present purposes, it means that here we can't talk about 'wrong'; about getting the wrong expression for the thinking, and so about expressive failure. Expressive failure is possible only on condition that there exist standards of right and wrong expression, of correct and incorrect speech, which are independent of the individual subject. In expressing our thinking we cannot, as the phrase goes, "talk any way our mouth goes". But this discussion naturally leads us to the question of what form these independent standards of right and wrong expression take; and thence to further suggestions about the nature of the primary grasp of instances of expressive failure. Let us look more closely at this question.

What form do the standards, by which the rightness or wrongness of expressions is measured, take? Let us look at some ideas. Could these standards take the form of an explicit set of rules relating linguistic expressions to the contents of the subject's thinking: for example; "In order to express the thought that X, the expression 'X' should be uttered"? Clearly, this will not do. Not only are such rules entirely uninformative, but they also

presuppose the very concepts which comparison with the standard is to help make possible. Associated with this idea of explicit rules for expressing the subject's thinking, is a suggestion (our second) as to the nature of the primary grasp of expressive failure. This second suggestion is that this grasp takes the form of a comparison of the subject's (incorrect) speech, with the standards of correct speech, where these standards consist of a set of explicit rules. Since this notion of explicit rules for expressing thinking is, as we have seen, useless (the rules are trivial, and presuppose the concepts at issue), this second suggestion falls with it. We need to look further for a satisfactory notion of what the standards of right and wrong expression consist in.

These standards of right and wrong expression, which make it possible for a subject to get the wrong expression for its thinking, must be independent of the individual subject. It must not be possible for the subject to pick on just any linguistic expression for the thinking to be expressed, since this would make expressive failure impossible. But if these standards cannot consist in a set of explicit rules, then they must be already implicit in speech (other than that of the subject in the situation of experience failure). The rules of correct expression must be implicit in such speech as exists prior to the instance of expressive failure. In correct speech, we might say, the rules are obeyed. There are clear connections here with Wittgenstein's arguments (in the Philosophical Investigations and elsewhere) about the nature of obedience to rules. These connections are important, and I will look at them later on in this chapter. For the present, I want



to examine a suggestion (the third) about the nature of the primary grasp of expressive failure, which might naturally seem to be associated with the notion, just introduced, of the form taken by the rules of right and wrong expression. This third suggestion, is that we can get a primary grasp of instances of expressive failure, by comparing the subject's speech in question, with correct speech: speech in which the rules are followed. In order to assess the value of this third suggestion, let us look at what sort of comparison between different speech is possible here. Can an understanding of expressive failure be achieved in terms of a comparison between the subject's speech and other (presumably correct) speech? An initial point is that the subject's speech will, of course, normally differ from other speech, in that we do not expect people to produce the same utterances as one another. That is not required for correct expression. Suppose, though, that there were empirical correlations between the utterances produced in the other, correct, speech, and the contextual state of the world. Suppose further that the subject's speech in question was not empirically correlated with the state of the world in the same way. Would a comparison between the correlations provide us with a grasp of the subject's expressive failure? The answer must be that it would not. Subjects in identical external situations may think or feel about those situations very differently from one another, and so produce different utterances, without their being any question of their failing to adequately express their thinking. If this proposed comparison of the subject's speech with other speech is to do the

job required of it, it must take instead the following form. The comparison must be between the content of the thinking which is to be expressed by means of the subject's utterance of a linguistic expression ("X"), and the content of the thinking which is expressed by the utterance of "X" in the other, correct speech. But such a comparison clearly cannot give us the primary understanding of expressive failure we need, since it presupposes the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment which it is to help provide for. This third suggestion as to the nature of the primary grasp of cases of expressive failure cannot, then, be adequate. It fails for essentially the same reason as the two preceding suggestions failed: namely, because it aims to use the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment, in constructing an understanding of the situation of expressive failure which is to help make possible those very concepts. Such an understanding cannot then form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. Let us now consider what has become in these pages a familiar approach to this sort of issue.

In the discussion in Chapter Four of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, it was argued that the primary grasp of situations of error cannot consist in some kind of synthesis of the understanding of its components (thought and reality), since that would presuppose the availability of the very concepts which that grasp was to help make possible. We have now reached a parallel stage in the present argument. In Chapter Four it was argued that if the primary grasp of situations of cognitive failure cannot be synthetically constructed from the understanding of its

components, then that grasp must be of the situation of cognitive failure as a totality.<sup>6</sup> The parallel point holds good here. The primary grasp of situations of expressive failure cannot be synthetically constructed from the understanding of its components (the thinking, and the means of its embodiment), since that would presuppose the availability of the very concepts which that grasp is to help make possible. The primary grasp of an instance of expressive failure must then be of that instance as a totality; as a whole. The grasp of this totality must itself be such as to leave open the possibility of reflective analysis of the situation in terms of the expression uttered being the wrong one for the thinking which was to be expressed or articulated. The force of this talk about grasping a totality, is brought out by considering that this totality cannot be primarily grasped from the 'inside' - in terms of an understanding of its components - since this would of course presuppose the availability of the concepts which are at issue. The situation of expressive failure can be primarily grasped as a totality only from the 'outside', leaving analysis of the 'inside' for subsequent reflection.

We can take the parallel with Chapter Four's argument further.<sup>7</sup> The totality we are considering is to be specific: one in which thinking and its means of embodiment are, as subsequent reflection can show, related, but at odds with one another. That totality must then be marked off, or delimited, from that which is 'outside' it; from its surrounding context. Without such delimitation, there would be no possibility of grasping a specific totality from the outside at all. Although the specificity of the totality can

be subsequently grasped in terms of the understanding of its components (as a situation in which the thinking to be expressed is not matched by the linguistic expression which is to express it), it is primarily grasped only in virtue of its delimitation from its specific 'outside'. If it were not so delimited then, since it cannot be grasped from the inside, there would be no way at all of grasping the situation as a totality at all. The primary grasp of expressive failure must then be of it in relation to an 'outside' from which it is marked off. We have to draw the boundary of the totality (the total situation in which thinking and its means of embodiment are related, but at odds) from without. It cannot be drawn from the inside without presupposing the very concepts whose possibility we are trying to account for.

Pressing the parallel further, we must ask how this grasp of the totality of expressive failure from without, is itself possible. If it is a situation of expressive failure, and if this failure cannot be grasped primarily in terms of a lack of fit between its components, then it must be primarily grasped in relation to that which it fails to achieve. What is it, then, which expressive failure fails to achieve? It fails to achieve a harmony between the thinking which is to be articulated and the expression which is to provide the means of that articulation. The situation of expressive failure must be primarily grasped as a totality in relation to what we might call, highlighting the parallel with the argument of Chapter Four, an expressive harmony.

This notion of expressive harmony offered as a way of talking about the context from which the situation of expressive failure must be delimited, clearly holds an important place in the structure of this argument. Let us look at it more closely.

To begin with, we must be clear that the notion of expressive harmony amounts to the notion of a coincidence between the thinking to be articulated in speech, and the linguistic expression which is to effect that articulation. This notion, then, clearly presupposes the concepts of thinking, and its means of embodiment in speech. The notion of expressive harmony is therefore unavailable to a subject prior to reflection on situations of expressive failure, in connection with which those concepts are to be made possible. Prior to such expressive failure, the expressive harmony from which it is marked off is unquestioned and unquestionable: for to question it would require those concepts which are at that stage unavailable. This point now leads us to the question of how the delimitation of the situation of expressive failure, from the context of expressive harmony, is itself possible.

In Chapter Four, the parallel problem was highlighted by investigating the suggestion that error is delimited from cognitive harmony by virtue of a comparison of the two situations. The parallel suggestion here, would be that expressive failure is marked off from expressive harmony by virtue of a comparison of the two situations. On the one side, the content of the subject's thinking is matched by the content of the linguistic expression: on the other side, it is not so matched. But this suggestion cannot work. For such a comparison would presuppose the concepts

of thinking and its means of expression, which that comparison is to help make possible. But if we cannot use those concepts in the primary delimitation of expressive failure from the context of expressive harmony, then what alternative is there? Any conceptual grasp of the relationship between expressive failure and expressive harmony, presupposes the availability of the very concepts at issue. What we have here can, then, be no abstract conceptual marking off of expressive failure from expressive harmony. The primary grasp of expressive failure in its delimitation from expressive harmony must be non-conceptual. The question now arises: how is such a non-conceptual grasp of the totality of expressive failure itself possible?

In order to be able to answer this new question, we need first to recognise that the situation of expressive failure cannot be delimited from the context of expressive harmony in a merely abstract manner, since a grasp of the totality of expressive failure delimited in such a way would require the concepts which it is to make possible. The grasp of the relationship between expressive failure and expressive harmony could not take the form of understanding the case of expressive failure as a failure to live up to an abstract ideal of expressive harmony, which we already had in mind. The delimitation of expressive failure from expressive harmony can only take the form of a concrete rupture, or breakdown, in that harmony. The relationship between expressive failure and expressive harmony, is the relationship of expressive failure to that in which it constitutes a rupture, or breakdown. It is this delimitation of expressive failure as a concrete breakdown in expressive harmony -

rather than as an abstract comparison between the two, or as a failure of one to live up to an abstract ideal of the other - which makes possible the primary non-conceptual grasp of the totality of expressive failure.

In arguing towards the necessity of a non-conceptual grasp of expressive failure, we have paralleled an important part of the argument about the possibility of the critical concept of thought.<sup>8</sup> At the parallel stage in that argument, I offered an illustration. I am sure that it would be, or at least seem to be, helpful to do so here. Nonetheless, I must postpone illustration of the argument for the time being. The reason for this is that, although the structure of the argument in this chapter runs parallel in important respects to that of Chapter Four, the issue of the relationship between thinking and its means of embodiment in speech is more complicated than the issue of the relationship between thought and reality. These complications need elucidating before intelligible illustration of the present argument is possible. I will do this in the next section, by looking in more detail at the nature of that expressive harmony which has been so important to the argument of this section. (An illustration of a breakdown in expressive harmony, which follows the elaboration of the notion of expressive harmony as a pattern of communication, is provided in the fourth section of this chapter: see pp. 275-6).

### Expressive Harmony

In the previous section I argued that the primary grasp of the situation of expressive failure is possible only in virtue of its delimitation from a context of expressive harmony. This delimitation, it was argued, must necessarily take the form of a concrete breakdown in that harmony. I want to now look closer at the nature of this expressive harmony.

The basic notion here is that of getting the right expression for the thinking which is to be articulated or expressed. But what is it to get the right expression for one's thinking? We noted, in the previous section, that in order for it to be possible to get the wrong expression for the thinking, there must be standards concerning the right and wrong expression of the subject's thinking. These standards must be independent of the individual subject. It cannot be the case that the subject can legitimately pick on any linguistic expression for the thinking to be expressed; for then it would be impossible to get the wrong expression, and situations of expressive failure could not occur. Expressive failure, then, occurs when these standards are not complied with; expressive harmony obtains when speech does comply with these standards. But what sort of form do these standards take? It was also argued in the previous section, that these standards cannot consist primarily in a set of explicit rules, relating linguistic expressions to the contents of the speaker's thinking. Not only would these rules be entirely trivial and unhelpful, but they would also presuppose the concepts of thinking and its linguistic expression. Now if these concepts are made possible only in the context of reflection on a



breakdown in expressive harmony, then these concepts are not available to the subject prior to that breakdown. Expressive harmony, then, cannot be a matter of following a set of explicit rules, whose understanding would already require the possession of those concepts. If the rules governing the rightness and wrongness of the expression of thinking cannot be primarily explicit, then they must be somehow implicit, or embedded, in something else. This 'something else' can only be speech itself. The rules of correct expression must be implicit in speech, other than that speech in which the speaker suffers expressive failure. In such speech, the rules are followed. Let us now look at the connections between this argument, and Wittgenstein's discussions on following a rule.

In order to make the connection explicit, recall one of the comparatively rare direct philosophical assertions in the Philosophical Investigations:

It is not possible that there should have  
been only one occasion on which someone  
obeyed a rule.<sup>9</sup>

I am committed to agreeing with Wittgenstein on this, having just argued that the primary grasp of expressive failure is possible only if expressive failure is delimited from a context of expressive harmony, in which standards of the right expression of thinking are already implicit in other speech. But let us elaborate on this a little further. Why is an isolated case of rule-following not possible? Let us imagine a single, solitary speech-act. Is it possible for such a speech-act to be, in the absence of any other speech, an instance of obeying the rules of correct speech? To

answer this question, let us consider the available alternatives. If that speech-act is the only instance of speech that exists, then, ex hypothesis, it cannot be obeying rules which are implicit in other speech. Perhaps it is instead the case that this speech-act could be setting standards for future speech-acts: but in that case it is a situation in which rules are being produced, rather than obeyed. The only alternative to this, is that the solitary speech-act is obeying an explicit rule, such as "In order to express this thinking, you should utter the expression 'X'." The argument I have already offered above, is that to be able to understand and follow such an explicit rule, would require the possession of concepts which are not available to the subject prior to reflection on breakdown in expressive harmony. The expressive harmony cannot then itself consist in the subject's following such explicit rules. Wittgenstein's argument on this issue is different. Instead of dealing with the necessary presuppositions of the concepts required to follow such rules, he argues that such a rule cannot determine how an expression is to be used: "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule".<sup>10</sup> The rule by itself cannot establish the right or wrong use of an expression, it requires an interpretation, a rule for applying the rule. But this in turn cannot establish the right or wrong use of an expression, since any course of action could be made out to accord with the interpretation. We would need an interpretation of the interpretation, and so on. In Wittgenstein's words:

any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning.<sup>11.</sup>

For Wittgenstein:

What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.<sup>12.</sup>

And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice.<sup>13.</sup>

Wittgenstein's insights into the business of following rules, are considerable. It is on the nature of their status that we part company. In the present chapter I have used these insights in the service of a more systematic philosophical strategy than Wittgenstein would have admitted. Following rules in speech has been shown to be a necessary condition of the possibility of expressive failure, hence of the concept of thinking, hence of the critical concept of thought, and hence of all critical philosophical inquiry. For Wittgenstein, these insights are notes "on the grammar of the expression 'to obey a rule'".<sup>14.</sup> Both Wittgenstein's argument and the argument of the present chapter came to the conclusion that following rules in speech cannot be primarily a matter of obeying explicit rules. It is rather that in actual speech the rules are already embedded. Let us look at the implications of this conclusion for the discussion of expressive harmony.

If the argument so far is right, then expressive harmony - getting the right expression for the thinking to be expressed - is a matter of implicitly following rules which are already embedded in other speech. Wittgenstein's term for this is "agreement" in language.<sup>15.</sup> In expressing its thinking aright, the subject is agreeing

in its use of language with the subjects of other speech-acts. Now let us look closer at this notion of agreement. In what exactly does it consist? Consider some suggestions. Their inadequacies should point us towards a more satisfactory account of the matter. First: could this agreement in the use of language be a matter of a subject taking a certain sample of other speech as a model: and, on the basis of that model, intentionally producing similar speech? This suggestion will not work, for this reason. The notion of similar speech employed here, if it is to play the part required of it, must amount to the notion of articulating the same thought-content by means of the same linguistic expression. In order to be able to intend to speak like the model speech, the subject would thus need to possess concepts (of thinking and its means of articulation) which are not at that point available to it. Let us turn to a second suggestion. This is the suggestion that agreement in use of language could consist merely in the happy coincidence that independent subjects happen to express their thinking by means of the same linguistic material. (Something like this suggestion is at work in the writings of the classical British Empiricists.) This second suggestion will not work either. For if agreement in the use of language consisted merely in this coincidence between the speech of independent subjects, then now could a grasp of a breakdown in expressive harmony be possible? It would have to take the form of a recognition that the subject in question no longer expressed its thinking by means of the same linguistic expressions as other speakers. But such a recognition would already require

the concepts of thinking and its means of expression, in order to be able to compare the way in which subjects articulate their thinking.<sup>16</sup> This suggestion is, in effect, the third suggestion offered in the previous section as to the nature of the primary grasp of expressive failure: but approached from a different angle. However, if repetitious, it can still point us in the right direction. As we will see, it points us in the direction of an account of the concrete nature of expressive harmony.

Both of these suggestions as to the nature of the agreement in language, in which expressive harmony consists, fail. They fail because they presuppose the possession, on the part of speaking subjects, of the concepts of thinking and its linguistic expression, which are made possible only in the context of reflection on a breakdown in that expressive harmony. Those concepts are not available to subjects in agreement in language prior to such breakdown. In order that we might see what alternative suggestion to these two is available, let us connect up the argument of the present section, with that of the section preceding.

In the argument of the previous section, the point was made that the primary grasp of the situation of expressive failure must take the form of a non-conceptual grasp of a concrete breakdown in expressive harmony. We have now seen that this expressive harmony - getting the right expression for the thinking which is to be articulated - is a matter of agreement in language: of implicitly following rules which are already embedded in other speech. But suppose that this agreement in the use of language were just a matter of an abstract coincidence, between the relation between the contents of the thinking

and the linguistic expression in one speech, and the relation between those contents in another subject's speech. If this were the case, then the grasp of a breakdown in expressive harmony, and so the primary grasp of expressive failure, would have to be a matter of comparing the relationship between the subject's thinking and its expression in one case, with that relationship in another case. But this sort of comparison, as we have seen, already presupposes the very concepts which reflection on this breakdown is to help make possible. Such a comparison cannot, then, form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. In the light of these remarks, what is needed to make possible that non-conceptual grasp of breakdown in expressive harmony, which is itself required as a necessary condition of the possibility of the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment? The requirement is this: in order for that non-conceptual grasp of breakdown in expressive harmony to be possible, the agreement in language-use in which that expressive harmony consists, must have a concrete nature. If it were merely a matter of an abstract relationship between the thinking and the expressions uttered by different subjects, then its breakdown could only be registered using the concepts whose possibility is at issue. Only if that agreement is of a concrete nature, can there be a non-conceptual grasp of its concrete breakdown.<sup>17</sup> Expressive harmony, then, must be a matter of a concrete agreement between speakers in the language they use. This has an attractive Wittgensteinian flavour, but it brings with it certain questions. This notion of 'concrete agreement' may have played a useful part in the present philosophical

strategy, helping us to account for the possibility of a non-conceptual grasp of situations of expressive failure, but what exactly does it involve? We know that agreement in the use of language cannot be just the kind of abstract coincidence described earlier, but what is it for such agreement to be 'concrete'? Consideration of these questions will lead us towards an understanding of the necessary structure of communication. We will take them up in the following section.

### Communication

Let us summarise the argument of the present chapter so far, in the following two sentences. The concept of thinking is made possible only in the context of reflection on a non-conceptually registered breakdown of expressive harmony into a situation of expressive failure. This expressive harmony - getting the right expression for the thinking to be articulated in speech - is a matter of a concrete agreement between speaking subjects in their use of language. The question I wish to consider in this section, is in what does this 'concrete' agreement consist? We can move towards an account of this concrete agreement, and so to an account of the necessary structure of communication, by considering a succession of points. These points will lead us in the direction of a conception of agreement in language as essentially involving subjects which understand each other's speech, and thence to a further development of the argument.

The first of these points is this. If there is to be concrete agreement in the use of linguistic expressions, then the speaking subjects involved cannot be entirely independent, and unrelated to

one another. If they were so unrelated, then any agreement in language could be a matter only of an abstract coincidence of the kind described in the previous section, making a non-conceptual grasp of the breakdown in that agreement, and so the concept of thinking itself, impossible. The second point is the fairly obvious one that the sort of relationship that exists between these speaking subjects, must involve their speech. If they merely related to each other in ways which do not involve speech (perhaps they knock against each other, or share the food they find), then this has nothing to do with agreement in speech. This leads on to the third point, which concerns the way in which the relationship between subjects involves speech. For there seems to be more than one possibility here. For example, could this relationship be merely a matter of causal effects on behaviour, such that an utterance of an expression "X", causes a subject to behave in a certain manner? The answer is that the relationship cannot be of this kind. Such a behavioural reconstruction of 'communication' has nothing to do with the notion of a subject articulating its thinking. If this 'agreement' were to break down (so that the utterance of "X" did not evince the normally resultant behaviour), the subject could perhaps reflect that the utterance had failed to produce the usual result: but there is no room for the distinction between the linguistic expression and the thinking which was to be articulated by means of that expression. A merely causal relationship between speech and behaviour cannot provide for the relationship within speech between the thinking and that by means of which it is to be articulated.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on these three points, let me offer a general remark about the nature of the relationship of agreement which is to obtain between speakers in respect of their use of language.



This remark, the fourth point, is as follows. Concrete agreement in language necessarily involves, at the least, speakers who understand the speech-acts of others, who understand what other subjects say. Let us look at the reason why this must be so. Concrete agreement in the use of language must take the form of a relationship between subjects, which involves their speech. Now, if, in that relationship, subjects do not grasp the content of the thinking which is articulated in other speech, then this restricts the sort of breakdown which is possible in that concrete agreement in language. For unless that relationship does involve one subject grasping the content of the thinking that is expressed in another's speech, then there is no way in which a breakdown in that relationship can be a matter of getting the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed. Breakdown might, perhaps, be a matter of failure to produce the behavioural effects usually associated with the utterance of a certain expression, but reflection on such a 'breakdown' could not analyse it in terms of the speaker's expressive failure. Unless the relationship between subjects involves, in part, subjects which grasp the content of the thinking expressed in the speech of others, then the question of a failure to get the right expression for such thinking simply cannot arise. Expressive harmony, then, consists in agreement between speaking subjects in language-use. This agreement must itself take the form of a concrete relationship between subjects, which consists at least in part of subjects grasping the content of the thinking expressed in another's speech: in other words, of subjects who understand the speech of others. It is then possible for a breakdown in this relationship of understanding to be reflectively analysed in terms of the subject's expressive failure.

Having introduced the notion of understanding in this way, we must now be careful about its use in this argument. I have talked of understanding as that grasp of the content of the thinking which is expressed in another subject's speech. This grasp in turn makes possible a reflective analysis of a breakdown in the relationship between subjects, in terms of a subject getting the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed. This is the sort of account which is available to us (writer and reader), as subjects who have gone through the process of acquiring the concepts of thinking and its means of expression in speech. But these concepts presuppose reflection on a breakdown in the context of expressive harmony: they are not therefore available to subjects which are in that state of agreement in language prior to its breakdown. What this means, is that those subjects' understanding of one another's speech cannot itself be a matter of explicitly associating a particular thought-content with a particular expression: for to do this would require those concepts which are at that point unavailable. That understanding, then, cannot consist in the abstract association of the content of a subject's thinking with the particular linguistic expression by means of which that thinking is articulated. The grasp of the content of the thinking expressed in another's speech cannot be explicit, but must be embedded in a more concrete form. What are we to make of this?

I have argued that expressive harmony must be a matter of agreement between subjects in their use of language. This agreement cannot be a mere abstract coincidence between the way their thoughts are expressed,

but must take the form of a concrete relationship in which one another's speech is understood. This understanding, in turn, cannot be a matter of explicit association of a thought-content with a linguistic expression, but must be embedded in the more concrete aspects of the subject's relationship. I now want to ask what, exactly, this understanding of another's speech 'concretely' consists in. Let me begin by calling the way in which a subject relates to the speech of another its response. I must be clear here that this response cannot be just a behavioural effect caused by the production of a speech-act: the response is that in which understanding - grasping the content of the thinking expressed in the speech - consists. Agreement in language, then, necessarily involves subjects responding to the speech-acts of others in a way which constitutes their understanding of that speech. Understanding one another's speech, which is itself a necessary condition of agreement in language being more than a mere abstract coincidence, must take the form of concrete responses, on the part of subjects, to the speech-acts of others. What sort of responses must these be? Will any sort of response do? Let me take up these questions.

To answer the second question: clearly not just any sort of response to speech will constitute understanding that speech. If agreement in language was just a matter of responding in any way whatever to a subject's speech-act, then there could be no way of registering a breakdown in that agreement. For if any response constituted understanding, then a breakdown in understanding could

not be registered on the basis of the response which that understanding consists in: it could only be grasped in terms of an explicit comparison between the content of the thinking expressed by means of the speaker's utterance of a certain expression, and the thought-content associated with that expression by the audience of the speech-act. But of course such a comparison employs concepts which are not at that stage available: they presuppose reflection on a breakdown in expressive harmony, and cannot be the terms in which such a breakdown is primarily grasped. Not just any kind of response will do here, then. But does this mean that each particular expression calls for one specific response? Let us consider this suggestion.

If agreement in language cannot be a matter of subjects responding to speech-acts in just any way whatsoever, then the suggestion that the utterance of each particular expression calls for a particular response might seem a natural one. In discussing why this suggestion will not work, we should be able to see our way forward to a more adequate account of the responses to speech-acts which constitute the audience's understanding of the speech of others. The problem with this suggestion of a one-to-one relationship between linguistic expressions and responses to their utterance, is that it calls for far too tight a connection between speech and response. For surely I may respond to the utterance "The ice-cream van is here" in a number of different ways: by covering up the ears of my children; by hiding in the cupboard under the stairs; by searching my pockets for money; and so on. Each of these responses, in different contexts, might count as understanding the utterance;

as grasping the content of the thinking therein expressed. To see what is meant by "different contexts" here, look at the responses in the example. Covering my children's ears would count as an understanding response, if I believe that they will want an ice-cream; if I do not wish to have to cope with their requests; and if I believe that covering their ears will prevent the request occurring to them. Hiding in the cupboard would count as an understanding response, if I believe that the children will want an ice-cream; if I do not want to cope with their requests; and if I believe that I will evade those requests by hiding. Searching for money is an understanding response if I believe that the children will want ice-creams; if I want to give them a treat; and if I believe that money is a pre-requisite for obtaining the ice-creams. What this example makes clear, is that a number of different responses to a speech-act may count as understanding that speech-act, given a certain context of beliefs and desires (or wants).<sup>19</sup> Recognition of this point (which has become a truism in discussions of 'radical interpretation')<sup>20</sup> allows us to reject the suggestion of a one-to-one relationship between linguistic expressions and responses to their utterance. Nevertheless, it brings with it a difficulty which we need to look at now.

The difficulty is this. If what counts as an understanding response to a speech-act is determined by the context of the hearer's beliefs and desires, or wants, then it seems that there is no limit to what can count as understanding the speech. When my neighbour takes out a sub-machine gun and riddles the ice-cream van with

bullets, this may count as understanding the speech - in the light of his belief that all ice-cream vans conceal platoons of enemy soldiers, and of his desire to protect our estate from their invasion. Any response whatsoever, given an appropriate context of beliefs and desires, can count as understanding another's speech-act: and this takes us back to the problem discussed two paragraphs ago, of how a breakdown in such an agreement in language could be grasped. Let us reconsider that problem, in the light of the points just made.

Our first way of dealing with this problem, was to argue that if agreement in language was just a matter of responding in any way whatsoever to the utterance of a linguistic expression, then there would be no way of grasping a breakdown in that agreement, without already presupposing the concepts of thinking and its means of expression which reflection on such breakdown is to help make possible. We have now apparently returned to this problem, only with an added qualification: it seems now that any response will do, will count as agreement in language, given an appropriate context of beliefs and desires on the part of the responding subject. How will a grasp of breakdown in agreement in language, understood on these lines, be possible? Clearly, if it is the context of beliefs and desires which determines whether a response counts or does not count as understanding the speech, then a grasp of a response as not understanding the utterance of the linguistic expression, presupposes some kind of awareness of the beliefs and desires of the responding subject. Now as everyday adults, who have gone through the process of acquiring the concepts of belief,

desire and linguistic expression, we are in a position to explicitly judge our audience's response in the light of what we know about their beliefs and desires.<sup>21</sup> Thus I might say that, given what I know of my neighbour's beliefs and desires, his response to the utterance "The ice-cream van is here" cannot count as understanding the utterance. Perhaps he thought I said "The hot-dog van is here". (Or, of course, perhaps his beliefs and desires have altered.) Indeed, interpreting the behaviour of other people is now fashionably seen as solving a set of simultaneous equations concerning the beliefs, desires and meanings of the subjects whose behaviour is to be rendered intelligible. But does this offer us a workable account of expressive harmony and the primary grasp of its breakdown? The answer must be that it does not. Let us consider why.

This account of expressive harmony and the primary grasp of its breakdown, in terms of responses to speech-acts within an explicit context of beliefs and desires cannot work. For that sort of explicit awareness of the context of beliefs and desires in the light of which a response to a speech-act constitutes understanding, clearly presupposes the concepts of belief and desire. Now I have already argued that the concept of thinking necessarily presupposes reflection on breakdown in expressive harmony, so that it cannot be employed in the primary grasp of that breakdown.<sup>22</sup> Exactly the same argument will be readily seen to apply to the concept of belief - indeed, in that argument, no distinction was maintained between these two concepts. Expressive harmony prior to breakdown, and the primary grasp of that breakdown, cannot then involve the concept of belief: for that concept is at that stage

unavailable. This is enough to show that the account suggested above, of agreement in language and the grasp of its breakdown, is inadequate. But what of the concept of desire? It is not clear to me that this concept necessarily presupposes a breakdown in agreement in language. Nevertheless, the following points can be made. First: were the concept of desire to be accounted for in mentalistic terms, it would not only come up against Wittgensteinian arguments, but would also be faced with the problem of the ontological inadequacy that characterises consciousness, and which was discussed in connection with the concept of thinking in Chapter Five. Second: to overcome this ontological inadequacy would take us along a path parallel in some significant respects to the argument of Chapter Five: The concept of desire would presuppose an understanding of a desiring subject, where this desire was embodied in a mode of that subject's existence. This aspect of the subject's existence would be its voluntary activity. In order then to be able to abstract the concept of desire from the understanding of the subject as acting, there would have to be a reflection on situations in which the desire and the behaviour were at odds. These would be situations in which the behaviour did not result in the fulfillment of the desire; situations of practical failure. Whatever the details of such an argument, we can be clear on this point. The concept of desire necessarily presupposes reflection on the subject's activity. Furthermore, this reflection will itself presuppose agreement in the language by means of which it is expressed. The concept of desire, that is to say, already presupposes a relationship between



speaking subjects of responses which constitute their understanding of one author's speech-acts. Without the existence of this agreement in language, the concept of desire would not be possible. Let me now add one further piece of this picture of agreement in language.

In considering the nature of responses to speech-acts, it has been argued that such response must, in order to constitute understanding the speech-act, be appropriate in the light of an unquestioned, assumed context of an awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world. There is a corollary here. This is that the speech-act must itself be appropriate in the light of that unquestioned context. For if a speech-act is not at all appropriate to that context of beliefs and desires, then there is nothing in relation to which the audience can make an apt response; the pattern of speech-act and appropriate response cannot exist. If, for example, a speaker says something of no possible interest to the audience, or tells the audience something which it is clear that the audience itself knows very well, then there is no appropriate response. The pattern of speech-act and response can only exist if at least some speech-acts are not like this, but are appropriate to the awareness of the world and the practical involvements in it, which, together provide the context of speech and response. Agreement in language, we can now conclude, must be a matter of a pattern of appropriate speech-acts and responses to them. Let us now put together the pieces of this picture of agreement in language.

Expressive harmony consists in an agreement between speaking subjects in the language they use. This agreement in language must itself consist of a relationship between the subjects of understanding one another's speech-acts. This understanding must itself take the form of appropriate responses to speech-acts. These responses are appropriate - they constitute understanding of the salient speech-act - only in the light of a context of beliefs and desires on the part of the responding subject. Originally, this context of beliefs and desires can not be explicit, since the concepts of belief and desire already presuppose a pre-existing expressive harmony (and, at least in the case of the concept of belief, a breakdown in that harmony). The context of beliefs and desires, in the light of which responses to speech-acts constitute the understanding of those speech acts, must then be taken for granted. That that context obtains must be unquestioned and unquestionable, since to question it would presuppose concepts which are not at that stage available. These beliefs and desires must have a restricted range, so as to rule out the possibility that any response to a speech-act could count as appropriate. For if any response could be appropriate, and hence form part of the agreement in language which constitutes expressive harmony, then the primary grasp of breakdown in that harmony would have to employ concepts which are not at that stage available. These would be either the concepts of thinking and its expression, in a comparison of the content of thinking expressed in the speech, with the thought-content associated by the audience with the linguistic expression; or the concepts of belief and desire in an explicit awareness of the context in the light of which a particular

response is grasped as inappropriate. We can offer a formulation of this general picture by adapting and extending a remark of Wittgenstein's: If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in the meaning of linguistic expressions, but also in beliefs, and in desires.<sup>23</sup> Agreement in language is possible only on the unquestioned presupposition of a certain shared awareness of the world, and certain shared practical involvements with the world. This picture of communication as a pattern of appropriate speech and response, involving an unquestioned sharing of awareness and practical involvements, comes close to Wittgenstein's notion of a language-game embedded in a form of life. Without such a form of life, expressive harmony - getting the right expression for the thinking to be expressed - is impossible. Hence also expressive failure; and in turn, the concept of thinking, the critical concept of thought; and critical philosophical inquiry in general, would be impossible.

We have arrived at a notion of communication as a pattern of speech and response in the context of a shared awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world. It is in the context of a reflection on breakdown in this communication - in which expressive harmony consists - that the concepts of thinking and its means of expression in speech are to be made possible. Let us then illustrate the notion of breakdown here. Suppose I utter the linguistic expression "Snake". Normally when I do this, my audience looks around at the ground, and then begins to climb the nearest tree. On this occasion, however, having yelled "Snake", I notice to my horror that my audience merely

smiles and sits on the ground. In the light of the context of beliefs and desires which I unquestioningly take for granted, this is an inapt response. My feeling of horror and bewilderment is the non-conceptual breakdown of an agreement between subjects in language. Subsequent reflection on this breakdown may bring to light a number of causes. It may be that my audience is offering herself as a religious sacrifice, or desires to die. It may be that the snake I see coming is her pet. It may be that she has not heard properly, and thinks that I said "Snack?" inviting her to a light meal. There are a number of different possibilities here. A particularly important possibility in the present context, is that I may have inadvertently said the wrong thing. Although I meant to say "Snake" I in fact said "Cake". Or perhaps I have got the wrong expression altogether: the word for this evil looking animal is "lizard", while "snake" is a term of endearment. Clearly, not all of these possibilities of breakdown in the total communication context involve expressive failure - getting the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed. Some of them, rather than due to a failure in understanding, of grasping the content of the thinking expressed in the speech, are a matter of the beliefs and desires which also go towards determining a response to speech. What then, determines when a breakdown in this pattern of speech and response is analysed as a case of expressive failure? I do not think that a set of jointly sufficient conditions can be provided here. Nevertheless, I shall offer a suggestion as to how things might go.

I am inclined to think that a reflective analysis of a breakdown in the pattern of speech and response - that is, in communication - can be of that breakdown as a matter of expressive failure, only under certain conditions. I think it is possible to reflect on that breakdown as due to a case of expressive failure, only when the audience not only apparently responds inappropriately, but subsequently refuses to accept the speech-act. Thus my audience in the example above might suddenly see the snake herself, jump up and exclaim "That's not a cake, it's a snake". This will lead me to reflect on my own utterance, rather than on her curious initial response, and to the reflection that I have said the wrong thing. My saying the wrong thing, may then be analysed as a failure to express my thinking adequately. (It may be due, for example, to my having a false belief.) I am sure that a reasonable story of how a breakdown in communication can result in a reflection on expressive failure, can be told along these lines. It has not here been my purpose to provide such a story, but rather to have provided a picture of what is involved in expressive harmony - in getting the right expression for the thinking to be expressed. Let me now summarise this picture, to provide the context for the next stage of the argument.

It has been argued in this chapter, continuing the argument from Chapter Five, that the concept of thinking is possible only in virtue of being 'semantically' linked with situations of expressive failure. The primary grasp of expressive failure cannot be from the 'inside', in terms of the thinking to be articulated not being matched by the linguistic expression employed; but must be a grasp of the situation as a totality from the 'outside',

in its delimitation from that which it fails to achieve, namely, expressive harmony. In the last two sections, I have argued that expressive harmony must consist in a concrete agreement between speaking subjects in the language they use. This agreement in language must itself be a matter of subjects relating to one another's speech in a way which constitutes understanding that speech. This way of relating consists of responding to speech-act: responses which are appropriate to the speech-act, given a context of beliefs and desires, or wants, on the part of the responding subject. This context of beliefs and desires cannot primarily be explicit, but must be an unquestioned assumption of a shared awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world. It is in the light of this unquestioned (and, prior to reflection on its breakdown, unquestionable) assumption, that responses to speech-acts constitute understanding that speech. This pattern of appropriate speech-acts and responses which constitutes agreement in language, which itself constitutes expressive harmony, we can call communication. While a break in this pattern is not always due to expressive failure, the primary grasp of expressive failure necessarily involves a non-conceptual grasp of a breakdown in that pattern - of a breakdown in that communication which constitutes expressive harmony. In the light of this account, we can now consider how the argument so far lays the foundation for the introduction of the notion of value.

### Communication as a Value

The summary of the argument at the end of the previous section sets the scene for the next step in the argument. This will be the argument that reflective analysis on a breakdown in communication as a case of expressive failure, is possible only if communication is a value for the subject concerned. Having elaborated the notion of expressive harmony over the preceding two sections, we are in a position to take up a point made earlier in this chapter, and to trace its implications.

In the first section of this chapter, it was argued that the concept of thinking is possible only in virtue of a 'semantic' link with situations in which the linguistic expression employed failed to fit the thinking which is to be expressed. Only in such situations, it was argued, can two demands be met. These are the demands that, on the one hand, the linguistic expression serve within speech as the material for the embodiment of the thinking; and on the other hand, that the content of the linguistic expression differ from the content of the thinking. These two demands could only be met, it was claimed, where there were situations in which the divergence in content between thinking and its means of expression, was a divergence within a speech situation in which thinking is embodied. The understanding of the kind of situation we need cannot be constructed from a grasp of its components. The alternative is to begin with the required understanding of the subject as speaking, and then to reflect on situations in which the components come apart from one another. In such situations, it was claimed, the thinking is that which is to be articulated by means of the linguistic expression, but where the expression fails to match up with the content of the thinking to be expressed. I called these situations cases of expressive failure, to highlight the parallel with the argument of Chapter Four.

Moving on from that point, it was then argued that the primary grasp of expressive failure could not be in terms of the linguistic expression failing to match up with the content of the thinking to be expressed, even though the notion of expressive failure was first introduced in these terms as part of the present philosophical strategy. This is because such a grasp employs the concepts, of thinking and its means of expression, whose possibility itself presuppose the primary grasp of expressive failure. The primary grasp of expressive failure must be of it as a totality delimited from that which it fails to achieve: expressive harmony. I have since filled out the notion of expressive harmony, but the point that I wish to make here is this. If expressive failure is primarily grasped in its delimitation from that which it fails to achieve, then this presupposes that that which it fails to achieve is a value for the subject. Expressive harmony is a value for the subject, in the light of which the subject's speech can be understood as a failure to achieve it. There can be no talk of failure, without presupposing a value in the context of which something can come to light as a failure. I will need to discuss this notion of value further, but before doing so, let me make a point which brings in the argument of the preceding two sections.

So far, I have argued that expressive harmony must be a value for the subject, if there is to be the required grasp of a situation of expressive failure. But in the preceding two sections it was argued that expressive harmony cannot consist



in any abstract coincidence between the subjects associate linguistic expressions with the content of their thinking. Expressive harmony must consist in a pattern of speech-acts and responses, in a context of a shared awareness of, and practical involvement in the world. I called this pattern, communication. In those two sections, then, the notion of expressive harmony, which was initially introduced as a label for that which expressive failure failed to achieve, has been enfolded. We now have a fuller picture of that which expressive failure is a failure to achieve. It is a failure to achieve that pattern of appropriate speech and responses which I have called "communication". This unfolding of the notion of expressive harmony therefore reveals that communication is the value in the light of which the subject's speech is revealed as expressive failure. It is the pattern of speech-acts and appropriate responses, in the context of shared beliefs and desires, which is a value for the subject. Having thus developed this point, let me look at what is meant by "a value" here, by considering a possible response to this argument.

One response to this argument might run as follows. The notion of value introduced above simply does not amount to very much - certainly it does not approach our idea of what a moral value is. For on the view presented in this chapter, the response continues, anything can count as a value, as long as it is something in the light of which there can be a failure to achieve it. The failure of the carburetor introduced in Chapter Three may bring to light the fact that a properly running car is a value

(for the subject for whom the carburetor's behaviour is a failure). Scratching a spot; getting to the top of a profession; having a peaceful holiday - each of these could be a value in the context of which certain events would count as failures. But these 'values', the response goes on, are hardly the sort of thing that can get us very far in a theory of moral value: these 'values' all seem to be entirely contingent on, and relative to, the desires or preferences of a particular subject. How can this notion of value help us in an argument to establish a transcendental foundation for a non-relativistic ethics? Many points are raised by this response to the argument of this section: to most of them, I devote the following chapter. For the present, I shall just take issue with the suggestion that the value of communication is a contingent one.

The argument I present here is brief. It is that it is necessarily the case that communication is a value. It is necessarily the case for the following reason. Anyone who questions the claim that communication is a value presupposes - as does all critical inquiry - the availability of the critical concept of thought. The argument of the preceding three chapters has been towards the conclusion that the critical concept of thought is possible, only if communication is a value (in the light of which expressive failure is primarily grasped, thus making possible the concept of thinking, and thence the critical concept of thought). This means that anyone who questions the claim that communication is a value, necessarily presupposes its truth, as a necessary condition of the very possibility of the critical questioning. That

communication is a value, cannot coherently be questioned, or put in doubt: its truth is necessarily presupposed as a necessary condition of the possibility of any scepticism. It is in this sense then that we can say that it is necessarily the case that communication is a value. It is, we might say, a matter of transcendental necessity rather than logical necessity (it is not a question of logical structure, or the meanings of the terms): a necessary condition of all critical philosophical inquiry. I have made this point mainly because I feel that the notion of a "necessary value", is sufficiently interesting to make the argument of the present section worth contesting. I shall have much more to say in the next chapter, about how communication as a value provides us with a transcendental foundation of ethics. For the present, I want to consider an objection to the argument of this section, which while accepting the general line of argument presented in these chapters, makes its departure from that argument at the point where 'evaluative', or 'normative', notions are introduced.

The objection to the argument of the present chapter takes this approach. It accepts what was argued in the first section of the chapter; namely, that the primary understanding of situations in which the thinking and its means of embodiment in speech do not fit, cannot be synthesised from an understanding of the components - the thinking and the linguistic expression - since this would presuppose the availability of the concepts whose possibility is at issue.

Rather, the objection agrees, we begin with an understanding of the subject as speaking. This speaking is normally such that we, possessing the concepts in question, would say that the expression matches the thinking. If the expression never matched the content of the subject's thinking, then there could be no question of the thinking being embodied by means of the linguistic expression. Given this understanding of the subject as speaking, the concepts of thinking and its means of embodiment become possible in a context of reflection on situations in which the normal coincidence of thinking and its expression fails to hold: the thinking and the expression come apart. It was then argued that we could formulate the relationship between thinking and linguistic expression, in the situations we are discussing, in this way. We can say that, in those situations, the thinking is that which is to be embodied by means of the expression; and that the linguistic expression is that by means of which the thinking is to be embodied in speech. Up to this point the objection agrees with the argument of the first section of the present chapter. Its point of departure from that argument is at the next step. It was argued in the second section of the chapter, that the lack of fit between the thinking to be articulated in speech, and the linguistic expression, is a matter of getting the wrong expression for the thinking which is to be articulated. At this point, the objection makes itself felt.

The objection is that, in the formulation offered above, of the relationship between the thinking and the linguistic

expression in a speech, we illegitimately introduce a normative element: the phrase "wrong expression for the thinking" indicates its presence. The objection claims that instead of introducing this normative element, we can give an alternative, and less contentious, account of a 'coming apart' of the normal situation of speech. According to this alternative account, we can take the normal speech situation as involving only an empirical, not a normative, norm. That is, we can take the normal situation as one in which a certain thought-content is empirically regularly associated with a certain linguistic expression. This normal situation 'comes apart' when the subject uses a linguistic expression which differs from that normally associated with the content of the subject's thinking. There need, the objection runs on, be no question of getting the wrong expression for the thinking to be expressed, and so no question of expressive failure: there is only the use of an expression which differs from the normal one. Consequently, there need be no talk of standards of right and wrong expression embedded in the speech of subjects; but only of empirical regularities that obtain between the content of speaking subjects' thinking, and the linguistic expressions which they utter. Consequently also, the totality of the situation, in which thinking and linguistic expression are at odds, can be grasped in its delimitation - not from that which it fails to achieve, but from that with which it differs. There would then, continues the objection, be no need to talk of a subject failing to achieve a pattern of communication with other subjects, but only of a subject who

begins to speak differently from others. The pattern of speech-acts and responses, which is termed communication, need not then be a value for the subject: it need only be the pattern which, empirically, normally obtains. In this way, this objection tries to give the same account of the possibility of the concept of thinking presented in this chapter, but removing from that account all the normative talk, and hence the basis for claiming that communication is a value. If this objection is sound, it is clearly a serious blow to my hopes of founding a theory of ethics on the arguments of the last three chapters. Let us therefore address the objection.

I will argue here that this objection fails, and that the normative element of the argument of this chapter is indeed necessary to an account of the possibility of the concept of thinking (and hence of critical philosophical inquiry). According to the objection, cases of lack of fit between the content of the subject's thinking and the linguistic expression need not be cases in which the wrong expression of the thinking has been used, but only cases where an expression different from the normal one has been used. The objection hopes by this manoeuvre to avoid having to talk about a failure to get the right expression for the thinking to be expressed. The idea seems to be that reflection on a breakdown in communication can analyse the cause of this breakdown as the subject's using an expression for its thinking which differs from that normally used (by the subject itself, or by other speaking subjects). The reason why this cannot be an

adequate account of the conditions under which the concept of thinking is possible, is this. If the concept of thinking is to be made possible, there must be reflection on a situation in which the thinking and its linguistic expression do not match up. The account offered of this affair by the objection under consideration, is that the linguistic expression is just a different one from that normally used. This is all that the lack of fit is supposed to consist in. But the idea of an expression different from that which is normally used, presupposes an awareness of the expression which is normally used: that is, of the expression which is normally used as the means of expressing that particular thought-content. The situation under reflection, has to be compared with other situations, in order to see whether the relationship between thought-content and linguistic expression in the various situations is the same or different. Such a comparison clearly already presupposes the concepts of thinking and its means of expression. It cannot then form part of an account of the possibility of those concepts. This objection has not, then, succeeded in producing a workable alternative account of what the lack of fit, between the thinking and the linguistic expression in the situations we require, consists.<sup>24</sup>

We are left, then, with an account of the possibility of the concept of thinking in which the normative element plays an essential part. The matching up of expression and thinking in speech, has to be a matter of getting the right expression for the thinking, which in turn is a matter of maintaining a pattern of communication with other subjects. A lack of fit

between the subject's thinking and its linguistic expression must be a matter of not getting the right expression for the thinking to be expressed (and so failing to express it), which is in turn a matter of not maintaining the pattern of appropriate speech and response which I have termed "communication". In order that the subject may reflect on situations in which the thinking and the means of its expression in speech do not match up, communication must be a value for the subject in the light of which certain instances of its speech can be grasped as failures to get the right expression for the thinking to be expressed. In the following chapter, I wish to examine in some detail how this notion of communication as a value lays the foundation for a non-relativistic ethics.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE FOUNDATION OF ETHICS

In the preceding three chapters I have presented an account of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, according to which that concept is made possible only in the context of reflection on certain ruptures in aspects of the subject's existence. Significant conceptual progress, correlatively, is made only by reflection on such breakdowns. Furthermore, these breakdowns bring to light certain values, as necessary conditions of the primary grasp of situations as failures, in 'semantic' relation with which certain important concepts are alone possible. In this chapter I wish to examine how the value of communication, argued for in the previous chapter, can serve as the basis for a non-relativistic ethics. This will involve a deepening of the account of communication and its necessary pre-conditions, and a development of the account of communication as a value. There are many issues to be discussed: I begin by offering a partial elaboration of what it is which is valued, when I claim that communication is a value.

#### Maintaining Communication

In this section I offer a preliminary elaboration of what it is for communication to be a value. The account I present will be progressively deepened through the arguments of later sections, but for the present, I wish to make two points. These points concern first the idea of communication as that

which the subject, in cases of expressive failure, fails to achieve; and second, an idea that might seem to be suggested by the argument so far, namely, the idea that the value I am presenting here is the value of talking as much as possible, to as many people as possible. Let me take up the first point.

In the final section of Chapter Six, it was argued that the primary grasp of situations of expressive failure must be of expressive failure as a totality delimited from that which it fails to achieve, namely, communication. But I must be careful with this talk about what expressive failure fails to achieve, because it seems to present a certain picture which, although congenial to some philosophers, is not one which I can accept. The picture that might occur to us here, is of a subject who gets into its head the idea of communicating its thoughts to another subject, and then sets about trying to do this (by embodying its thoughts in linguistic expressions). This is the goal which, in cases of expressive failure, the subject fails to achieve. This picture of independent subjects, with thoughts which they decide to try and communicate to one another, cannot be a workable picture of communication: though I leave the argument for this claim to the next section. In the present section I want to lessen the temptation to use that picture, by showing that communication is not so much an abstract ideal to be achieved, as a pre-existing pattern to be maintained. Let me elucidate. Suppose, by way of a contrast, that it is my intention to become head of the department, in the college at which I work, by the age of forty. If, on the due

date, I am not installed in the appropriate office, then I can count my past attempts as failures to achieve my goal. Becoming head of department by the age of forty was a value, in the light of which I recognise previous attempts as failures. The situation with regard to what I have talked of as "failure to achieve communication", is different. In this case, it is rather that, having already successfully participated in the pattern of appropriate speech and response which is communication, I find that I have failed to maintain this pattern: communication has broken down, because of my failure to use the right linguistic expression for the thinking which was to be expressed. It is thus not that I have failed to achieve communication in the first place which is the problem, but rather that I have failed to maintain an already existing pattern of speech and response. It is the maintenance of communication, rather than its achievement in the first place, which is the value in the light of which a certain speech-act is a failure. Indeed, prior to reflection on its breakdown, the pattern of communication is taken for granted as an unquestioned and unquestionable assumption; it cannot be taken as something which was the object of an initial achievement. If this argument works, so that we see that in valuing communication, it is its maintenance, rather than its initial achievement, which is at issue; then we are led to the second point with which I wish to deal in this section. This concerns the question of what is required, in order that communication be maintained.

Before turning to this point, I wish to introduce a term that will be frequently used throughout the rest of this chapter. I argued in the preceding chapters that concepts such as that of experience, thinking, belief and desire, are possible only on reflection on certain ruptures in aspects of the subject's existence. Furthermore, and especially where the breakdown in question is a communication-breakdown, this reflection will always presuppose a pre-existing state of agreement in language: for only in language can explicit reflection take place. It is therefore a necessary condition of the possibility of the concepts mentioned above, that there exists a state of agreement in language - which we have seen to consist in a pattern of speech and response that I have called communication - in which those concepts are not available. I shall call this state, the "primary stage of communication", or simply "primary communication". It is that stage of communication presupposed by those breakdowns which make possible the concepts mentioned earlier. In the rest of this chapter I shall have occasion to try to characterise this primary stage of communication, as it is for the subjects involved. Such characterisation will clearly have to dispense with concepts such as that of thinking, belief and desire. I hope that the reasons for undertaking such characterisation will emerge in the course of the following discussion. Let us now turn to the second main point of this section.

The question of what is required, in order that communication be maintained, may arise in the following manner. It may seem that, in arguing for the maintenance of communication as a value,

I am suggesting that we go about talking all the time, to anyone who happens to be in earshot. I want to show that I am not suggesting this, but rather that maintaining communication is a matter of keeping the channels of communication open for use when appropriate. To show this, let me recall part of the argument of the fourth section of Chapter Six.<sup>1</sup> It was argued there that expressive harmony must consist in a concrete agreement between subjects in the language they use, which itself consisted in a pattern of speech-acts and responses which were both appropriate in the light of an assumed context of beliefs and desires. It was argued not only that the audience's responses must be appropriate to the speech-act, but also that the speech-acts must themselves be appropriate, in order for the pattern of speech and response which constitute expressive harmony to be possible. I now need to elaborate this last point.

I have argued that speech-acts must themselves be appropriate in the light of an unquestioned context of an awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world. What is it for speech-acts to be appropriate here? In order that we may move towards an adequate characterisation of the primary stage of communication, let us consider a certain temptation. We might be tempted at this point to use an account, directly suggested by the way in which the issues of the appropriateness of speech-acts has been introduced in the course of the present philosophical strategy. We might be tempted to claim that speech-acts are appropriate, if produced with the intention of furthering the fulfilment of

an individual's desires, by providing that individual with fresh, relevant information. Thus I might know that my friend wants to buy a car, and that she does not know where to find one. Accordingly, I say to her, "Here are some second-hand car advertisements"; and hand over the newspaper. If I knew that she had no interest whatsoever in second-hand cars, or that she already knew of the existence of the advertisements, having just read through them herself, then my speech-act would be inappropriate. We could continue to say, on this account, that with speech-acts of this nature, there is no clear appropriate response. My friend would not know what to make of my speech-acts. This is because the conditions (of relevance to audience interests, and of informational content) under which certain responses would be appropriate, do not obtain. It is only when, for example, my friend does not know of the adverts, and yet wants a car, that both my speech-act, and her response of taking the paper and reading it, are clearly appropriate. Now it may not always be clear when a speech-act is appropriate (suppose for example, that I thought that the advertisements might stimulate my friend's interest in buying a car?): the important point being made here is that there are occasions on which a speech-act is clearly inappropriate, making the normally appropriate response out of order. Some speech-acts, at least, we would say, must not be inappropriate in this fashion, since if all speech-acts were so inappropriate, there could not then exist that pattern of speech and response which I have called "communication". Now this sort

of account of what it is for speech-acts to be inappropriate, takes appropriateness, roughly, to be connected with the fulfilment of an individual's desires by increasing the relevant beliefs of that individual. We might then think that this account is exactly what is required. After all, it explicates the notion of appropriateness, which was introduced in the course of the present strategy, precisely along the lines suggested by that introduction. Furthermore, we can agree with the content of the account (with, perhaps, certain minor caveats). But we need to be careful. For this account cannot do the task we require of it here. For although we, writer and reader, as ordinary adults who have gone through the process of acquiring the relevant concepts, can thus characterise the context in relation to which speech-acts and response are appropriate, this account cannot provide us with a characterisation of the primary stage of communication as it is grasped by the subjects themselves at that stage. For the account projects onto subjects at the primary stage of communication the recognition of beliefs and desires; where this recognition requires concepts which are not at that stage available. Let me now elucidate this remark about the availability of concepts, so as to help determine how the context in relation with which speech-acts and response are appropriate, is grasped by subjects at the primary stage of communication.

It has been argued in Chapter Six that the context, in terms of which speech-acts and their responses are appropriate, is not a context of beliefs and desires which are recognised as such by

the subjects involved, but is rather a context of an unquestioned assumption of a certain awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world. This is how communication, in what we might call its primary stage, prior to the sort of breakdowns whose reflective analysis makes possible new concepts, must be characterised. In this stage, communication cannot occur in a context in which the subjects recognise beliefs and desires as such, since to do so would require the concepts of belief and desire; and it has already been argued that each of these concepts necessarily presupposes a pre-existing pattern of communication. It is because these concepts are not available at the primary stage of communication, that the context of practical involvements in the world cannot be at that stage grasped as relative to the desires or interests of individuals. That context is instead grasped, therefore, as a set of impersonal practical involvements, in the sense that at that stage, those involvements cannot be relativised to the desires or interests of any individual, or collection of individuals. At the stage where the concepts of belief and desire are not available, at the primary stage of communication, those practical involvements are unquestioningly and unconditionally assumed, with no critical recognition that different individuals may have different practical involvements. This is a difficult point to make, so I shall offer an illustration. The primary stage of communication is presupposed as already existing by the kind of reflection on breakdown which makes possible the concepts of belief and desire. At this stage, the awareness of and practical involvement in the world, which provides the context for the pattern of appropriate speech and



response, must be characterised in a particular way.

Rather than saying that this context is a matter of recognising the interests or desires of the surrounding individuals, so that a speech-act can be produced which is relevant to those interests, we should say that the context is one of an awareness of what is to be done. Thus rather than say, for example, that this context consists of a subject recognising that sowing corn is in the interests of herself and her neighbour, so that the utterance "I have some seed: will you bring your seed-drill?" is appropriate, we should characterise the situation in the following manner. We should say that this context is one in which the subject is aware that the corn is to be sown. This context consists of a grasp of what is to be done, which is not relativised to the desires or interests of particular individuals, but which is held as an objective practical directive. In the light of this grasp, the speech-act is appropriate. It is this kind of practical awareness of the world which provides the context in which speech-acts and their responses can be appropriate, and so in which the pattern of communication can exist. Without such a non-relativised grasp of what is to be done, there could be no appropriate speech-acts, and so no pattern of appropriate response, and so no communication. Communication is therefore possible, only in virtue of necessarily presupposing the prior existence of an unquestioning acceptance of what is to be done in the world. This impersonality cannot be taken as merely an entrenched perpetuation of agreement between subjects in respect of what

are already recognised as their particular aims and desires. This impersonal grasp of practical involvements must precede such recognition, and is the basis on which the subsequent recognition of the aims and desires of individuals can occur.

Now I will claim in the final section of this chapter, that the practical involvements which are, at the primary stage of communication, grasped as holding impersonally, are in fact relative to particular communities or individuals. The practical involvements of other communities or individuals may diverge from, or conflict with, those which hold for a particular subject. For the present, let me make some further remarks by way of elaborating the idea that communication is possible only on condition that there is, at the primary stage of communication, an unquestioning acceptance of what is to be done as holding impersonally.

In talking of the impersonality of the practical involvements which form part of the necessary context of the pattern of communication, I do not wish to create confusion. In talking of that impersonality I mean only that the context of primary communication is one in which practical involvements are grasped as given, and not as relative to the interests or desires of particular persons. This does not mean that those practical involvements concern no one in particular, for they do. To take the illustration introduced earlier, it may be that in that particular community it is the women who farm, whilst the men are concerned with child and house-care. In such a society, the awareness that the corn is to be sown will determine not only

the appropriateness of the speech-act produced, but also the audience to which it is addressed: "Will you come with your seed-drill?" will be appropriately asked only of other women. Let us consider another illustration: observing a road accident, I see that attention to the victims needs to be given. This attention is to be given, not by just anyone, but by someone equipped to help. This awareness determines not only a range of appropriate speech-acts, but also the audience to which they are appropriately addressed: I call the ambulance-service, say, rather than the refuse-collection department. Or again, from a beach I see a shark's fin near some swimmers. This calls for evasive action, not by just anyone, but by the swimmers. They are the people to whom the impersonally grasped practical involvement is directed. Accordingly, I call out "Shark" - addressing myself to the people who are to evade the animal. Finally, to take an example from Sartre, I am late for an appointment.<sup>2</sup> I see the street-car ahead of me. I am aware that the street-car is to be overtaken. There is, however, no-one to whom I can say anything appropriate in this context. The driver cannot hear me, and no one else can do anything to help. Accordingly, I say nothing. In each of these examples, it is a context of awareness of certain impersonally grasped practical involvements which determines the appropriateness both of the content of the speech-act, and the audience to which it is addressed. With this in mind, I can now return to the second main point to be discussed in this section.

From the discussion above, it is clear that in talking of maintaining communication as a value, I am not suggesting that we all go about talking to one another as much as possible. For communication is not, on the account I have given, just a matter of endless chit-chat. Communication is primarily a matter of a pattern of appropriate speech and response. What is appropriate, is in turn determined by a context of an awareness of, and practical involvements in, the world. It is the awareness of what is to be done, which determines the range of appropriate speech-acts, and the audience to which they are appropriately addressed. If this is so, then in what does maintaining communication consist? I shall discuss this question at more depth in later sections. For the present, as a first approximation, I will say that maintaining communication is a matter of maintaining the conditions under which a pattern of appropriate speech and response is possible.

In this section, I have argued that it is the maintenance, rather than initial achievement, of communication that is a value. I have also argued that this maintenance involves, not increasing amounts of chatter, but maintaining the conditions in which appropriate speech and response can continue. In the course of this second part of the discussion, I have characterised the context in which communication at the primary stage takes place. I characterised this context as one of an awareness of practical involvements grasped, unquestioningly, as impersonally given; rather than as a context of recognition of the desires and interests of particular individual persons. In doing this, it emerged that

it is the grasp of what is to be done, which determines the range of appropriate speech-acts; the audience to which they are appropriately addressed; as well as the range of appropriate responses. I feel that this characterisation of the context of primary communication is important, and I will return to it in later sections. In the following section, however, I wish to restrict myself to a discussion of the supposed non-relativity of communication as a value.

#### The Non-relativity of Communication as a value

One of the claims I have made for the argument in these pages, has been that it will provide the foundation for a non-relativistic ethics. While we may now have some feel for the claim that all scepticism necessarily presupposes communication as a value, I feel sure that for many people it will be difficult to swallow the claim that this value is not relative to the interests, wants or desires, of individual subjects. It is to making this claim easier to swallow that the present section is devoted. Let me begin by asking a simple question. For whom (or what) is communication a value?

The answer I will give to this question, is that communication is a value for every being who raises sceptical doubts about whether communication is a value; and, more generally, communication is a value for every being which understands itself as a thinking being. The reasoning here begins as follows. I argued in the last section of Chapter Six that, since all scepticism presupposes the availability

of the critical concept of thought; and that since it is a necessary condition of the possibility of that concept that communication is a value, then it follows that scepticism about the claim that communication is a value is incoherent: such scepticism is possible only if false. But this may seem rather vague. Does communication have to be a value for everyone? Or just for a few sceptics? How can I make good the claim that it is not just sceptics, but all those who conceive of themselves as thinking beings, for whom communication is a value? I shall try to answer these questions.

We can specify for whom communication must be a value, by considering the following. The understanding of a subject as thinking, which is a necessary condition of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, is itself possible only in the context of a reflection on breakdown in expressive harmony: on a rupture in that situation in which thought and linguistic expression match up. Such a breakdown can be grasped as a case of expressive failure, and so make possible the concepts of thinking and its expression, only if communication is a value for the subject concerned. The question to which we must now address ourselves, is this: for which subject is communication necessarily a value? Can anyone - a friend, neighbour, or passer-by - fulfil the role of the subject for whom communication is a value, and reflection on whose expressive failure makes possible the concept of thinking and thence the critical concept of thought? If just any subject can indeed fulfil this role,

then it leaves open this possibility: although there must be at least one subject for whom communication is a value, in order that the critical concept of thought be possible, there is no reason why communication need be a value for other subjects. Consequently, there is no reason why a moral sceptic should not accept that communication must be a value for some subject, and yet deny that communication must be a value for others, including herself. I will now argue that this option is not in fact open: that is, it is not the case that just any subject can fulfil the role of the subject whose expressive failure provides for the possibility of the concept of thinking, and thence of the critical concept of thought. I shall argue instead, that the subjects for whom communication is necessarily a value must include those subjects which employ either the critical concept of thought, or the concept of thinking. (I shall not argue either that communication can be a value only for subjects which employ these concepts, or that communication must be a value for all thinking subjects.<sup>3</sup> Neither of these subjects, I will suggest, is the case.)

Let us consider our position here. I will discuss first a natural approach to the question of which subjects are those for whom communication is a value, and then discuss an alternative approach, in the light of whose inadequacy we can arrive at an adequate answer to the question. The natural way to approach the issue of which subjects are those for whom communication is a value, might seem to be this. Reflection on the failure of a speaking subject to get the right expression for the thinking to be articulated in speech, is most naturally seen as reflection by

a subject on itself. That is, we would have a subject which suffered a breakdown in communication due to its own expressive failure, and which then reflectively analysed that failure. In articulating its non-conceptual grasp of the breakdown in expressive harmony, the subject would move towards the concept of thinking. The subject might, for example, begin to say something like "I said that there was a bull in the field, but I didn't want to say that. I meant (or, perhaps, meant to say) that there was a cow in the field". In this way the subject would be working towards a concept of thinking as that which is normally expressed, but which can fail to be expressed, in speech.<sup>4</sup> The fact that this process would, on this account, be a process of self-reflection, would mean that the subjects for whom communication is a value must include the reflecting subjecting itself. That is, it is the subject which possesses the concept of thinking, and the critical concept of thought, which is the subject for whom communication must be a value. Consequently, since the availability of those concepts presupposes such reflection, then communication must be a value for any subject which employs them. Accordingly, any subject who raises questions about the validity of moral claims, is necessarily a subject for whom communication is a value. General scepticism about moral claims will be self-defeating: for such scepticism presupposes, as a necessary condition of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, that communication is a value for the subject raising the sceptical questions. Now although this way of approaching



the question of the identity of the subjects for whom communication must be a value might seem to be a natural one, and one which renders general moral scepticism self-defeating, we cannot adopt it just as it stands. We need to consider what alternative accounts there might be as to how the concept of thinking, and the critical concept of thought, are possible. In discussing what alternative accounts are available, we shall see that although the argument is a little more complicated than that just outlined, it is indeed the case that any subject which uses the concept of thinking, or the critical concept of thought, is a subject for whom communication must be a value. General moral scepticism will indeed have been shown to be self-defeating. Let us, then, now turn to that discussion.

The only alternative to the natural suggestion described in the previous paragraph is a simple one. It is that reflection on the expressive failure of a subject for whom communication is a value might not be a self-reflection, but might instead be a reflection on a subject other than the reflecting subject itself. This alternative would then leave open the possibility that a subject might acquire the critical concept of thought, and the concept of thinking, without herself being a subject for whom communication is a value. The concepts would be possible instead in the context of reflection on the expressive failure of another subject for whom communication was a value. I will argue, however, that whether or not the primary grasp of expressive failure will be a grasp of the failure of a subject other than the reflecting subject, such a grasp is in any case possible only if communication is a

value for both the speaking and the reflecting subject.

The reasoning is as follows. It was argued in Chapter Six that the primary grasp of expressive failure must be of that failure as a totality delimited from that which it fails to achieve, namely, expressive harmony. This expressive harmony was seen to consist in a pattern of appropriate speech and response which I termed "communication". Expressive failure, furthermore, can be possible only on the presupposition that maintaining communication is a value in the light of which the subject's speech act can be seen as a failure. So much holds, whether or not the subject which grasps expressive failure is the same subject as that which commits the failure. The suggestion we are now considering, is that the reflecting subject could grasp the expressive failure of another subject, in the light of its recognition of communication being a value for that speaking subject, but without it necessarily being the case that communication is a value for the reflecting subject itself. This suggestion cannot be right. For in order for the reflecting subject to be able to relativise the value of communication to an individual subject in this way, it would need to already possess the concept of communication. But this concept is not available prior to reflection on breakdown in communication. The primary grasp of expressive failure cannot then rely on a recognition that communication is a value for the speaking subject: for such a recognition would require the possession of concepts which are not at that stage available. The primary grasp of expressive failure, even if that failure is on the part of a subject other than the reflecting subject itself, is possible only on the unquestioned presupposition that communication is a value for

both subjects. This presupposition must be unquestioned, since at that stage the concepts with which to question it, are not available. That is, communication must be a value for the reflecting subject itself, in the context of which another subject's utterance can be grasped as a case of expressive failure. Perhaps an illustration will help to make this point clearer. Someone calls to me "Shut the window, please". I go towards the window and reach up my hand before realising that it is already closed. My feeling of surprise is the non-conceptual registration that the pattern of appropriate speech and response has broken down. Now, looking at this from a detached viewpoint it is possible to see that a number of different things may have gone wrong here. I may have misheard, the speaker may be performing a play, I or she may have got the meaning of "window" or of "shut" wrong. She may believe that the window is in fact shut, and so on. Suppose, though, that she continues to ask me to shut the window, and responds to my failure to do anything about it, in a way which makes it plain that this is a serious request. If I have no reason to mistrust my hearing, or my grasp of the words uttered, I may reject the request as inappropriate: the speaker, I will decide, has said the wrong thing. Now it is not at all clear to me whether the hearer can go farther than this recognition that something wrong has been said, to analyse it as a case of expressive failure (rather than, say, false belief about the window). It may be that only the speaker can in fact reflectively analyse the wrongness, or inappropriateness, of what she has said in terms of either getting the wrong expression for the thinking

to be expressed, or of getting her facts wrong. I am strongly inclined to suspect that what must occur is a process of negotiation between speaker and hearer, in which the possibilities are reflected on together, and which is settled in accordance with the power relations between the two. But I must leave this issue aside here. The point I need to make in connection with this illustration is this. The primary grasp of the speaking subject as having said the wrong thing, and thence of having failed to express their thinking, is possible only on the unquestioned and unquestionable presupposition that communication is a value. Without this presupposition, there can be no question of the speaking subject having failed to find the right linguistic expression for the thinking which is to be articulated. Now at this primary stage of communication, prior to reflection on breakdown, the concept of communication itself (as a pattern of speech-acts which are appropriate in the light of a context of awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world; and of responses which are appropriate, and which constitute understanding what is expressed in the speech) is not available. This means that at this primary stage there can be no recognition on the part of subjects, that communication is a value. In the absence of the possibility of recognising, at the primary stage of communication, that communication is a value, there is no way in which the subject which grasps and subsequently reflects on expressive failure can have relativised that value to a particular individual speaking subject. The concepts required to do that, are not at that

stage available. The reflecting subject must itself be one for whom communication is an unquestioned value, in the light of which the speech-act of another subject can be grasped as an expressive failure. This means that the primary grasp of expressive failure, which is to make possible the concept of thinking and, subsequently, the critical concept of thought, is possible only if communication is a value for both the speaking subject and the reflecting subject. Communication is necessarily a value for the reflecting subject, which through its reflection requires the concepts at issue. This enables us to say that general moral<sup>5</sup>scepticism is indeed self-defeating, since anyone who questions the validity of moral claims (or of any other kind of claim) requires the critical concept of thought, and hence is a subject for whom communication is a value. We now have a general ad. hominem argument against all general scepticism about the validity of moral claims, since the very possibility of such scepticism presupposes its falsity, it presupposes that maintaining communication is a value for the subject which raises such questions. This conclusion is clearly important, and yet it raises certain questions which could lead us to doubt whether it is strictly warranted. These include the question of whether, despite the fact that we have argued that communication must be a value for anyone who uses the concept of thinking, or the critical concept of thought, we do in fact have a moral value here. I will discuss this, and other issues presently.<sup>6</sup> For now, I wish to make a clarificatory point about the argument just presented, concerning how communication as a

value can be grasped by subjects at the primary stage of communication.

The point is this. I have argued that in order for the primary grasp of expressive failure to be possible (and so the concept of thinking), communication must be a value not only for the subject whose failure this is, but also for the subject which grasps this failure in its delimitation from what it fails to achieve, if this reflecting subject is different from the speaking subject. In one sense this is true, but in another it is misleading. For although we, possessing all the relevant concepts, can say that communication must be a value for the reflecting subject, in the light of which that subject can grasp the speech of another as a case of expressive failure, this does not give us an adequate characterisation of how things are for the subjects themselves in the primary stage of communication. For those subjects, who cannot at that stage possess the concept of communication itself, it is not the case that communication is recognised as a value both for the speaking subject, and for the subject which primarily grasps the situation of expressive failure. Furthermore, for these subjects, communication as a value cannot be relativised to any individual, or set of individuals. Communication is, to use the term introduced in the previous section, an impersonal value. At the primary stage of communication, prior to the grasp of breakdown in communication, communication must be a value which is unquestioningly presupposed. The reflecting subject cannot primarily grasp the speaking subject as having said something wrong "if she wished to communicate", since the concepts (of wish, or aim) required for this grasp are not at that stage available.

Instead, the reflecting subject must grasp the speaking subject as having said something wrong, simpliciter: where the value of saying the right thing is unquestioningly presupposed. The argument of this section has brought out the way in which communication must be a value which holds impersonally, and which is not therefore relativised to individuals, in order for a grasp of expressive failure (and so, subsequently, for the critical concept of thought) to be possible. But this will perhaps seem, nevertheless, to have accomplished only part of what I set out to do in this section. For could it not just be the case that communication is a value contingent on the preferences of individual subjects, even though this preferences must initially be presupposed as common to speaking and hearing subjects? Although I feel that this is certainly not the case, I feel also that I should say a little more about the non-contingency of the value of communication on the wants or preferences of individuals. I will do this by considering two stages of a possible response to the argument just presented.

Let us consider directly the question of whether communication, although a value for all subjects which employ the critical concept of thought (or the concept of thinking), might be nevertheless contingent, as a value, on the desires or preferences of all those subjects. The answer to this question is that communication as a value is not contingent in this way. It is a value for those subjects whatever particular wants or preferences they might have. The reason for this, is that communication must be a value for those subjects which come to acquire the concepts of thinking or thought,

prior to the possession by those subjects of the concept of communication. Communication is, at the primary stage of communication, an unquestionable and unthinkable value. It can be revealed as a value, only through reflection on its breakdown. Prior to that reflection, the concept of communication (as developed in Chapter Six) is not available. Consequently, it is illegitimate to ascribe to subjects in the primary stage of communication any desires, preferences, aims etcetera, which concern communication. Whatever particular desires or intentions such subjects have, communication must nonetheless be a value for any subject which employs either the critical concept of thought, or the concept of thinking.

In this section I have argued that communication is necessarily a value for any subject which possesses either the critical concept of thought, or the concept of thinking. It is a value which holds impersonally, and is not relative to particular individuals among those subjects. Furthermore, it is a value which is not contingent on the desires or intentions of such subjects, but holds whatever desires or intentions those subjects may have. No-one, therefore, can coherently question the claim that communication is a value; for such questioning presupposes possession of the critical concept of thought, and hence that communication is indeed a non-relative, non-contingent value. Such scepticism is possible only if false. I want to use this argument as a basis for further discussion of how far this account of communication as a value fits in with our notions of moral values. In the section that follows, I will argue that communication as a value is characterised by the prescriptivity which is at the heart of our notion of morality.



## Prescriptivity

In this section I want to briefly position the argument of this chapter so far, in the context of some recent philosophical work on the nature of morality. I hope that this will enable us to get a clearer perspective on the nature of communication as a moral value, and that it will pave the way for a recognition that it is a necessary moral principle that communication be maintained. Let us begin by considering the nature of our everyday moral discourse.

Ordinary moral discourse, argues John Mackie, lays claim to a certain objective categorical, prescriptivity.<sup>7</sup> Moral principles are usually taken to be objective, in that their grasp is a matter of knowledge rather than decision. They are also taken to be categorical, in that they are independent of the particular aims, desires or intentions of any individual, or group of individuals. This claim to objective categorical prescriptivity does not, however, find much favour in recent British philosophy. To simplify matters, we can say that philosophers who reject this claim fall into two broad camps, each associated with a view of the nature of moral discourse. On the one hand, there are the non-cognitivists, such as Hare, who accepts the categorical quality of moral rules, but deny their objectivity: such rules are founded on subjective decisions, and have no objective validity.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, there are naturalists, such as Foot, who reject the categorical aspect; arguing instead that morality is a system of hypothetical imperatives which depend on the ends of the agents in question, and that nothing more categorical is needed.<sup>9</sup> (Foot makes clear that the ends she discusses can be other-regarding, as

well as self-regarding.) Moral beliefs can therefore be true or false on this view, but their truth or falsity depends on the ends and desires of the agents in question. Neither of these camps accepts, then, the objective, categorical, 'binding force' which is ordinarily ascribed to moral rules. Each camp offers instead an account of why we ordinarily cling to this illusion of objective categoricity, instead of recognising morality for the non-absolute affair they take it to be. In offering such accounts, they are following a procedure associated especially with Hume: in many areas of philosophy Hume undermines naive objectivism, and replaces it with a critical subjectivism accompanied by a theory of why we cling to that objectivism. This procedure leaves us with no hope of a straightforward reinstatement of the objective categorical nature of morality, and with a sense of dissatisfaction with what we are offered in exchange. How does the account of communication as a value fit into this context?

The account given above of communication as a value fits into the context just outlined like this. That communication is a value is, first, something that we can come to know, by going through the argument presented so far in these chapters. Our grasp of this fact is a matter of knowledge, rather than subjective decision. Secondly, the value of communication is not dependent on any particular aims or desires of agents: the imperatives which it gives rise to are in this sense categorical ones. We can sum this up by saying that we can know that communication is a pattern of appropriate speech and response which is, categorically, to be maintained - whatever the aims

of particular agents. The account of communication as a value, and of the principle of maintaining communication, shows that this value and this principle possess precisely those characteristics which are ordinarily taken to characterise everyday moral discourse. We need not then quibble about saying that it is a moral principle that communication is to be maintained (though nothing very much hangs on this). What else could be meant by calling something a moral principle? We have reached a point at which we can say that communication is a value which possesses an objective, categorical prescriptivity. Its obtaining is a matter of knowledge rather than decision; and the prescriptions which it licenses are independent of the particular aims or desires of individual agents, or groups of such agents. We have established a transcendental foundation of ethics. But we should not expect that this argument will remain unchallenged. Before we can feel secure as to its conclusion we need to look at some awkward questions, which concern the extent to which we can base ethical principles on the account of communication as a value.

One question is this. Surely there are some people who both possess the critical concept of thought, and yet who clearly do not value communication? Do we not know of people who either shun communication, or even take a pleasure in its disruption. Do not such people provide an empirical refutation of the theory presented in this chapter? What we have here are cases in which the particular aims of an agent conflict, in the most direct way possible, with what I have claimed to be a value binding on all subjects who possess either the critical concept of thought, or the concept of thinking. What can we make of this conflict?

We have to recognise here the possibility of a disparity between the transcendently established value of communication, and the 'values', or aims, which an individual subject may recognise for itself. For it has been shown that communication must be a moral value for any subject which possesses the critical concept of thought, whatever the particular aims or desires of such a subject. If people act against the principle that communication is to be maintained, then they are acting immorally: they are not doing that which is categorically to be done, by any subject which possesses the critical concept of thought. In this way we can preserve the objective, categorical prescriptivity of the principle of maintaining communication: that principle holds, despite the possibility of conflict with the particular aims of individual subjects. Now this argument for the principle of maintaining communication, and the notion of a disparity between the transcendently established value of communication, and the aims or desires of a particular subject, are bound to give the impression that I am pulling rabbits out of an empty hat: there must be a trick, somewhere. Let me then try to show that there is nothing up my sleeves, by deepening the question asked at the beginning of this paragraph, concerning the relationship between communication as a value, and the aims and desires of particular individuals.

The question can now take this developed form: "We may be able to accept that the existence of communication is a necessary condition of our possessing the critical concept of thought, and indeed that the existence of communication is a necessary condition of our being able to do things such as lying, insulting, deceiving.

and so on, which are in conflict with what you have called the principle of maintaining communication. Even so, given that it may be a necessary condition of such endeavours that communication exists, it is not clear that any prescriptive weight can be carried by this notion, or that we can found obligations on the necessary existence of communication. For," the question continues, "why should I not, having accepted that communication must exist for me to possess the critical concept of thought, then use or abuse communication when and how I please, in the prudential pursuit of my own self-interest? Where is the obligation to maintain communication (even given that maintaining communication involves the actual production of speech-acts only when appropriate)?" The answer I must give to this question is this. The existence of communication is indeed a necessary condition of many of the acts that are ordinarily deemed to be wrong, and which violate the principle of maintaining communication. But we must go further than this to show that communication is not something to be maintained only when it fits in with prudential self-interest. It is to be maintained whether it serves prudential aims or not. The argument goes like this. Our questioner evidently possesses the critical concept of thought. Now this concept is possible, and can be acquired, only on condition that the questioner reflect on a failure of a subject to get the right expression for the thinking to be expressed in a particular utterance. (I omit, for brevity, some of the stages of the by now familiar argument of Chapters Five and Six.) Now a grasp of such expressive

failure is possible only if the subject which grasps it is one for whom communication is a pattern of speech and response which is to be maintained. If communication were not something to be maintained, then there could be no grasp of expressive failure, and so no critical concept of thought. The questioner, who possesses this concept, is thus necessarily a subject for whom the principle of maintaining communication already holds, (although, at the primary stage of communication, this fact cannot be recognised as such). Furthermore, as we have seen, this principle is not dependent on any particular aims or desires of the subject, but holds categorically. This means that issues of prudential self-interest are not relevant to the principle that communication is to be maintained. Where ideas of self-interest begin to emerge, and thenceforth a questioning of the obligations concerning the maintenance of communication arises, we must show the questioner how to retrace the steps by which that questioning was made possible. The questioner must be shown, by means of the argument presented in this thesis, that she is already a subject for whom communication is a value, for whom communication is something to be maintained. In drawing the questioner back to a recognition of the values and principles that she necessarily already holds, reasoning has an end. The questioner is confronted with the recognition of the sort of being she necessarily is. This is the kind of self-recognition which it is so difficult to attain in a society which works in many ways to prevent, obscure or distort people's understanding of themselves. It is in the light of such

self-recognition, that we may give self-interest its proper place: as something which may be legitimately pursued within a certain framework of moral principles, but which cannot justify transgressions of those principles. I hope by now to have dispelled the impression of having performed some kind of conjuring trick; and to have shown that in tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, we arrive at an understanding of ourselves as subjects for whom a basic principle, that of maintaining communication, necessarily and categorically obtains. Nevertheless, I shall allow the questioner another try, so as to bring out what his question must, in effect, be a request for. Let us look at the questioner's last chance.

"I am still not clear", the questioner may say "on what communication is a value for. It may very well not serve to promote the aims I set for myself. Why, then, should I act in accordance with this principle, which from the individual subject's viewpoint may seem to be an imposition from without, and one which conflicts with the subject's own aims?" (This is reminiscent of the old question, "Why should I be moral?") What sort of answer can we give to this question? We cannot rely, in answering this question, on the claim that action in accordance with this principle will contribute to the individual's happiness; for this would in effect make the validity of the principle dependent on the aims of the subject, and so would remove its categorical quality. Communication is not a value for something else: for, say, the promotion of prudential self-interest. It is rather a value which we can come to recognise as constituting in part what sort

of beings we necessarily are. The way to answering our question, then, is to recognise that the question cannot be a request for a justifying reason to act in accordance with the principle of maintaining communication, but only for a motive. For as far as reasons are concerned, they have already been given. The reason why someone should maintain communication is simply that, as a subject which employs either the critical concept of thought or the concept of thinking, communication is for them something which is, categorically, to be maintained. If things were not so, the subject would not possess either of the concepts mentioned, and would not be able to ask such questions in the first place (since such questions necessarily presuppose an awareness of the possibility that the statement of the principle of maintaining communication might be false). There is no more that either can, or need, be done as far as providing reasons for acting in accordance with the principle that communication is to be maintained. Reasoning has come to its right end. The question at the beginning of this paragraph can, in the light of the point just made, only be properly taken as a call for a motivation to to act in accordance with what is (or at any rate can be) known to be right. Given that maintaining communication is often difficult, and often conflicts with a subject's own avowed aims and desires, what motivation can be offered as an inducement to the subject to abide by the moral principle? I shall address this question directly in the next section. At present I wish only to show how we must understand the question with which this paragraph begins. Let me now turn to a corollary of the argument just presented.



If the question "Why should I maintain communication?" is raised after the argument in these chapters has been followed, then it can only be properly understood as a request for a motive. Correlatively, there are similar restrictions on how we can properly understand the reasons which an agent produces for its actions. Let me illustrate this. If someone says "Well, I know that communication is to be maintained, but I shall nevertheless not tell X about her promotion [for "but I nevertheless did not tell X about her promotion"] because it pleases me to see people kept in the dark", how are we to take this? We cannot take this as a reason justifying the action, because the principle of maintaining communication has been objectively established as licensing categorical imperatives. We can take the subject's statement only as an account of the subject's motive in acting in that way.

In this section I have argued that the principle that communication is to be maintained has a certain binding force. It is a principle which is not dependent on the particular aims or desires of agents, and yet one which can be known to obtain. Its validity is not, therefore, affected either by changes in agents' aims or desires, or by coming into conflict with them. Its validity is necessarily presupposed by any subject which possesses the critical concept of thought. It cannot then be coherently put in question, since the validity of the principle is a necessary condition of the very possibility of such doubt. The principle of maintaining communication is, I have argued,

an objectively necessary and categorical moral principle. In a sense, this is the culmination of the argument of this thesis: a transcendental foundation of ethics has been established. In the following sections, however, I wish to fill in some of the detail of what has been established. In the next section I will turn to the question of what motive there can be for acting morally; for acting, that is, in accordance with the principle of maintaining communication.

### Moral motives

So far in this chapter, I have been concerned to provide a transcendental foundation of an objectively necessary and categorical moral principle. In the last section, it became clear that my main aim was to show that this prescriptive principle - that communication is to be maintained - necessarily holds for any subject which possesses the critical concept of thought. This left to one side the question of what motivational considerations, as against justifying reasons, there could be for acting in accordance with this principle. Now it may seem, in any case, unlikely that I can produce motivational considerations which will satisfy everyone who demands them. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, in sharply separating the justification from the motivation of the subject's action, an important issue in moral philosophy is being ignored. In this section, I will briefly present this issue, situate the account of communication as a value in the context of rival views on that issue, and then argue that communication as a value not only justifies, but also motivates, the action of the agents we are discussing.

The issue I want to present, is formulated in terms of a dispute between 'internalism' and 'externalism' with regard to the motivational aspect of morality.<sup>10</sup> Internalism is the view that the presence of a motive for acting morally is guaranteed by the truth of ethical propositions themselves. On this view, the motivation must be so tied to the truth, or perhaps the meaning, or moral statements, that when someone is (or perhaps merely believes she is) morally required to do something, then it follows that she has a motive for doing it. Externalism, on the other hand, is the view that the necessary motivation is not supplied by ethical principles or judgements themselves, and that an additional psychological sanction is accordingly required to motivate our compliance with the 'moral law'. In the previous section, I may have given the impression that, since I separated justifying from motivating considerations, I was advocating an externalist view. Consequently, it may seem that I am committed to leaving the question of motivation to the psychologists. I wish to counteract such an impression, and to do this will provide the outline of an internalist account of the motivation to act in accordance with moral principles.

The basis for this account, is a recognition that the necessary presupposition that communication is a value for all subjects capable of asking critical questions, allows of two directions of investigation. The account presented in the preceding sections has been concerned with how, in tracing the necessary conditions of the possibility of the critical concept of thought, we can establish an objective, categorical prescriptivity linked to communication as

a value. But another line of investigation remains open. For if a grasp of expressive failure is to be possible, then communication must be presupposed as an end which governed the subject's (linguistic) behaviour. For if the behaviour of the subject we are considering is not in any sense directed towards communication, towards maintaining a pattern of appropriate speech and response, then there is no possibility of a grasp of its utterance as a case of expressive failure. A grasp of the totality of expressive failure is possible only of that totality in delimitation from that which it fails to achieve. There can, in turn, be no talk of failure, in the absence of the notion of an end to which the behaviour in question was in some sense directed. A necessary condition of the primary grasp of expressive failure (and thence of the concept of thinking, and so on), is therefore that expressive harmony is in some sense an end towards which the subject's behaviour has already been directed. I argued in Chapter Six that this expressive harmony consists of a pattern of speech and response which I called "communication". Consequently, communication must be recognised as an end towards which the subject's behaviour is already directed. Communication is therefore revealed as a value in a two-fold sense. It is revealed as a prescription: communication is a pattern of speech and response which is to be maintained. It is revealed also as an end: communication is a pattern of speech and response to which behaviour is already directed. Communication thereby serves as both prescription and motivation. While this conclusion seems a tidy one to me, it

also raises certain questions which need to be answered, concerning the possibility of this motivation.

The first is a question which has already been discussed in Chapter Six.<sup>11</sup> It is this. How can a subject be motivated by an end which the subject cannot itself conceive of, since it lacks the concepts required for such a conception? The answer to this is essentially the same as that provided in the earlier discussion. There are cases where the end towards which our behaviour is directed, is recognisable only through reflection on a failure to achieve that end. In the case of communication, I have argued that the primary grasp of expressive failure - the failure to get the right linguistic expression for the thinking to be expressed - is possible only if expressive harmony is an end towards which the subject's behaviour is directed. Since the concepts of expressive harmony, and of communication, are unavailable prior to reflection on a breakdown in communication; it follows that we have such a case here. That is, the subject's behaviour must be directed towards an end, communication, which is recognisable only through reflection on a failure to achieve that end. We might say that communication is an end which 'moves' the subject to act in ways which are fully comprehensible to the subject only when that end is not achieved.

A second question parallels that asked in the preceding section about conflicts between the aims of an individual, and the categorical prescription associated with communication as a value. The question here is this. Surely there are some beings who possess the critical concept of thought, and yet who are not motivated to abide by the principle of maintaining communication? Sometimes they will be

motivated to communicate if it furthers their own interests, but the maintenance of communication does not with them carry any, as it were, categorical motivating force. Their motivation to maintain communication is dependent on their personal aims or desires. There are indeed, apparently, cases where the subject seems incapable of such motivation, even where it would serve their own interests. Surely such pathological cases, and the ones described before them, constitute an empirical refutation of the claim that communication is an end which motivates all subjects capable of critical thought? It may seem that in the case of motivation, as against the case of establishing the prescriptivity of the principle of maintaining communication, such cases must provide an empirical refutation of that claim. To see that they do not, we need to recognise that there is a possible disparity between what we might call deep and surface motivation. Let me explain this. Communication as an end towards which a subject's behaviour is directed, is at the primary stage of communication unthinkable by the subject itself. The subject can not at that stage possess the necessary concepts. Whatever particular goals the individual subject may acquire for itself, it is necessarily the case that communication is an end towards which its behaviour is directed. If this were not the case, the grasp of cases of expressive failure would be impossible (and so, therefore, would the critical concept of thought be impossible). What sense then, can we make of cases where this categorical motivation is in conflict with the particular goals that a subject sets itself? In order to be able to understand such cases, let us recall part of the argument from the first section of the present chapter.

In that section, it was argued that the context in which speech-acts and their responses can be appropriate, needs to be characterised in a certain way. It is a context which consists in part of an unquestioning acceptance of certain practical involvements with the world - the corn is to be sown, the tiger avoided, and so on. Now none of these practical involvements is itself necessary; for example, in Greenland the people would live, speak, think and criticise without even being aware of the existence of corn and tigers. Nevertheless, it is an awareness of what is to be done in the world, which determines what speech-act is appropriate, and to whom it is appropriately addressed. At the primary stage of communication, there are no limits on the range of possible audiences: anyone might be an audience, if the unquestioningly accepted practical involvements make it appropriate. At this stage, the production of appropriate speech-acts and responses is an end towards which the subject's behaviour is directed: if it were not so, then there would be no grasp of expressive failure, and so no concept of thinking, and so on. We can, then, establish that at the primary stage communication is an end for all those who become critical subjects (and, indeed, for some who do not become so). How is it, then, that there seem to be subjects who move from this stage, and come to alter their motivation? We must understand the position in the following way. Since communication as an end is not dependent on the particular desires and aims of individuals, then it cannot be affected by any changes in such desires and aims. What must happen is that communication as an end which 'moves' subjects to act in certain ways, becomes obscured

or distorted by certain experiences that the subject undergoes. Uncovering communication as a primary end for a subject, is the task for psychiatry rather than philosophy. Even so, the argument just outlined lays down limits to psychiatric theory: for if it were the case that at no stage was communication an end towards which the subject's behaviour was directed, then the subject could not acquire either the concept of thinking or the critical concept of thought. Let me give a piece of speculative psychiatry as an illustration of the point being made here. There are cases in which men are apparently motivated in their behaviour towards women, by a desire to destroy them. Such a desire clearly conflicts with the suggestion that all critical subjects are motivated by the principle of maintaining communication. We can understand this conflict by recognising that such men undergo experiences which effectively remove women from the range of subjects with which it is appropriate to communicate. The openness towards communicating with anyone, where shared practical involvements make it appropriate, is closed off. A psychological block against maintaining communication with a certain group of subjects has developed, which it is the psychotherapists task to undo. If successful, the subject in question is thereby freed to direct his behaviour towards communication as an end. It is not that communication has ceased to be an end for the subject, but that it has been distorted or obscured in certain ways.

I feel a certain embarrassment about the argument of this section, which was not present in the preceding section. This is because although it is the philosopher's task to trace the



prescriptivity of communication as a value, uncovering the maintenance of communication as an objectively necessary and categorical principle, it is not the philosopher's task to take a subject through the process of recognising that communication is indeed a categorically motivating end. (Again, this aim of achieving self-recognition is not easy to fulfil in a society such as ours.) All I have aimed to show here, is that communication is necessarily both a prescriptive value - that which is to be maintained - and a motivating end - that towards which behaviour is directed. Having offered this outline of an internalist account of moral motivation, I should like to turn in the next section to a consideration of some substantive ethical implications of the argument presented in this chapter.

#### Substantive ethical implications

In this chapter I have so far argued that the principle that communication is to be maintained, is an objectively necessary and categorical one. It holds for at least all beings which possess either the concept of thinking, or the critical concept of thought. It is not dependent on the particular aims or desires of agents. It is internally motivating. If the argument of this thesis has been valid, then I have reached the end which I set myself. Nevertheless, although I do not have the space in which to develop a comprehensive ethical theory here, I feel that I should offer at least one substantive ethical implication of the principle of maintaining communication. I shall argue that this principle

implies that people should not be killed. This is hardly a novel conclusion. The point of the argument will be to show that all this talk of communication as a value does indeed have moral consequences; and to give some idea of the direction by which a more fully developed ethical theory could be obtained. I will proceed in two stages. First, I will consider the implications of maintaining communication in a situation where practical involvements are accepted by the subjects as impersonal and given. Second, I shall develop the argument to account for what happens when the practical involvements of different individuals or communities diverge, or even conflict.

First, then, let us recall part of the argument of the first section of this chapter. In that section, it was argued that the primary stage of communication, preceding any breakdown in communication, had to be characterised in a certain way. At that primary stage, communication is a pattern of speech-acts and responses, which are appropriate given a context of awareness of, and practical involvement in, the world around. These practical involvements, prior to any reflection on breakdown which could make possible the concepts of personal aims, desires, interests and so on, would have to be unquestioningly accepted as given, and as impersonal: that is, not a relative to the aims or desires of individual agents or groups of individual agents. In such a situation, a certain practical involvement - expressed, perhaps as "pain is to be relieved" - would necessarily be accepted as holding for all subjects. Each subject is equal insofar as this practical involvement is grasped as impersonal, and so as obtaining

for each subject: That pain is to be relieved, for example, is taken as given; and since it cannot be relativised, at the primary stage, to the aims or desires of individuals, it is literally unthinkable that there could be a subject which is not bound by it. It is this sort of practical involvement which forms part of the context within which speech-acts and responses to them can be appropriate. It also determines which subject is the appropriate audience for a speech-act. At this primary stage of communication, or wherever practical involvements are shared, what can the maintenance of communication imply for the treatment of other subjects?

We can begin by saying that since, at the primary stage of communication, it is the context of awareness and practical involvement which determines the appropriate audience for a speech-act, then the range of subjects with whom communication might be undertaken is unlimited. Any subject for whom the practical involvements hold, or to whom they relate, will be a subject with whom communication might take place. There is an unlimited range of potential communicants. What does maintaining communication with such subjects consist in? I have already argued that maintaining communication is not a matter of endless chatter with whoever comes into view. What else, then, does our hard-won moral principle involve? If communication, that is, a pattern of appropriate speech-acts and responses, is to be maintained, then it implies the following with regard to the treatment of other subjects. If a subject is a potential communicant, then for communication to take place that subject must be in such a condition that it is able to produce appropriate speech-acts, and appropriate responses

to speech-acts. Now there are many ways in which subjects can fail to be in such a condition. There are often psychological, social and political barriers to speaking and responding appropriately in a certain context of practical involvements. The principle of maintaining communication requires that other people be treated in such a way as to maintain their status as potential communicants. While I feel that this requirement may carry consequences for political action, I want here to focus on a very direct instance of this requirement. If other people are to be treated so as to maintain them as potential communicants, then it is clear that, under normal conditions, they are not to be killed. Killing someone is very directly going against the principle of maintaining communication, which requires that others are treated as potential communicants. In this way, then, we can see that the principle that communication is to be maintained has substantive, if unoriginal, ethical implications. But so far I have been discussing the situation at the primary stage of communication, in which practical involvements are unquestioningly grasped by the subjects as given, and as impersonal: that is, they are not grasped as relative to the aims and desires of individuals. What happens when this unquestioned assumption of practical involvements as holding impersonally, and so as holding equally for each subject, is brought into question? Does this affect how we are to treat others? Let us consider these questions in the context of a discussion of cases where subjects differ from each other with respect to their practical involvements.

We can begin the discussion like this. Although at the primary stage of communication practical involvements may be taken as holding impersonally, we know, as ordinary adults having undergone the processes which make such knowledge possible, that practical involvements are in fact relative to particular individuals or communities. In one community, for example, dolphins may be seen as animals to be befriended and played with, in another as animals to be killed for meat. In the context of such different practical involvements, different speech-acts and responses will be appropriate. To a call of "There are some dolphins", people of one group may wade out to play with them, while people of another group may search for their harpoons. Given that the contexts, in relation to which speech-acts and responses are appropriate, may differ, then it is clear that there are possibilities here for ruptures in communication between subjects with different practical involvements. Imagine the shock of someone from the first group described above, when in response to her call a member of the second group fetches a harpoon and kills the animal. Communication, the pattern of appropriate speech and response, will have broken down in such a way as to reveal, on reflection, that practical involvements do not hold impersonally: some hold for some people, others hold for other people. Before discussing what consequences this has for our drawing of substantive ethical implications, I should like to make two points concerning this realisation of the relativity of practical involvements.

The first point concerns what we are to make of this disillusionment, this loss of innocence, with regard to practical involvements taken as holding impersonally. Clearly it is not a necessary condition of subjects possessing the critical concept of thought, that a particular practical involvement holds for them. Members of either group described above could possess that concept, whilst also possessing different practical involvements. Practical involvements are not absolute, but relative. In this respect they differ from the value of communication, which is a necessary condition of any subject possessing the critical concept of thought. But even if practical involvements are relative to the aims and desires of individuals, or communities, we must be careful how we understand the relationship between such individuals or communities. Frequently, (I am thinking of people such as Hobbes), society is seen as a collection of individuals, each with their own aims and desires, some of which happen, fortunately, to coincide with each other. The account offered in this chapter, however, provides a different picture. For it argues that the primary notion in terms of which to understand relationships between people is not the concept of the individual, fully armed with aims and desires. Instead, it is the notion of a community of subjects who communicate in the light of a context of practical involvements which are taken to obtain impersonally and so, a fortiori, are shared by the community. We have seen that there may be a breakdown in this unquestioned acceptance of practical involvements as holding for all; but this should not prevent us from seeing that it is the notion of community which is the primary one here, not that of the

individual. For the notion of an individual with its own aims and desires, is possible only through reflection on a breakdown in communication, which reveals a break up of the practical involvements of the community.

The second point, which, while important in its own right, also serves to reinforce the first point, is this. A breakdown in communication can be reflected on as due to a divergence of practical involvements on the part of the various subjects, only within certain limits. The breakdown cannot be reflected on as due to a total divergence of practical involvements, so that the subjects differed entirely in their conception of what is to be done (so that, for example, one subject held that pain and hunger were to be relieved, while another held that they were to be promoted). This is not possible, because in the absence of a common ground of practical involvements, the behaviour of another subject would be entirely incomprehensible: we could understand nothing of that subject's behaviour in terms of its language, beliefs, and aims. Without a common ground of practical involvements, the recognition of communication breakdown as due to a certain divergence in practical involvements would not be possible. This is essentially the same point made by Davidson, but in connection with practical involvements rather than beliefs. Having thus elaborated a little on the idea of subjects diverging from each other in respect of their practical involvements in the world, what can be said of the substantive ethical implications of the principle of maintaining communication in such situations? Let us look at a suggestion, which seems to find some empirical backing in the behaviour of certain social groups.

The suggestion is this. When people move, through reflection on ruptures in communication, from the primary, pre-critical stage of communication, they can come to a realisation about the context of practical involvements with reference to which speech-acts and responses are appropriate. This is the realisation that this context of practical involvements is not, as it was previously taken to be, given as holding impersonally, for all subjects. This context is in fact relative to a particular community (perhaps a community with only one member). What this implies, the suggestion continues, is that the moral obligation to maintain communication is not unlimited with respect to the range of other people to be treated accordingly (that is, as potential communicants). That moral obligation is to maintain communication only amongst the community for which those practical involvements hold; and not necessarily to maintain communication with subjects for whom those practical involvements do not hold. Thus we have popular examples of family, or tribe moralities, where members of the family or tribe are treated as potential communicants; but members of other groups, or family members who no longer share those involvements, are treated only as means to the ends, the practical involvements of the family. (The popular example here is the Mafia.) We now have to consider whether the principle of maintaining communication is indeed limited in range to the group of subjects with which practical involvements are held in common, or whether it extends beyond such a group. What argument can help us here? For a moral principle limited in such a way will not seem to most people a very satisfactory foundation of ethics.



The argument we need is this. Where communication has broken down, reflection on this failure still requires that communication be a value for the reflecting subject. Where reflective analysis reveals that the breakdown is due to a divergence in practical involvements between subjects (rather than a divergence of beliefs, or meanings), then the unquestioned acceptance of practical involvements as given, and as holding impersonally for all, is broken. The problem now is this. Where the previously unquestioned sharing of practical involvements no longer exists, how can communication take place? For communication requires a common context of practical involvements as the reference-point for the appropriateness of speech-acts and responses to them. How can the principle of maintaining communication, whose obtaining is a necessary condition of reflection on communication-breakdown, be acted on in this kind of situation? The answer is that in order to act in accordance with the principle that communication is to be maintained, there must be a negotiation of a new shared context of practical involvements. This context will now be recognised as relative to the groups involved, so that the previous pre-critical innocence cannot be regained: but a new consensus is required if appropriate speech and response is to be again possible. We can see that there is a solid basis for such negotiation, by recalling the second point made earlier: namely that reflection on communication as due to a divergence in practical involvements is possible only on a certain common ground of practical involvements which still hold for both parties. Where this negotiation is successful, communication is restored. Where it is not, then communication continues to be

broken. In either case, the moral obligation is to treat others so as to maintain their status as potential communicants. This rules out killing people, since this is to act directly against that principle. I should make it clear, here, that I do not regard this argument as establishing an absolute moral prohibition on killing people. There may be occasions (in war, in self-defence), in which people are rightly killed. What I would argue is that this is not allowable on the ground of some other moral principle, which is allowed to override the principle of maintaining communication. It is rather that such killing is allowable on the basis of a broader understanding of the extent of communication. In war, where negotiations of common practical involvements have broken down, the only way to re-establish communication, and to maintain subjects as potential communicants and communicators, may be to kill those who are trying to kill you. Clearly the substantive moral decisions to be made in such situations go beyond the scope of the present work. We can, in any event, see that the principle of maintaining communication not only holds for all subjects which possess the critical concept of thought, but is unlimited (or universal) with regard to the range of subjects who are to be considered and treated as potential communicants.

If the argument of this section is valid, then we now have a moral principle which is objectively necessary and categorical, which is universal in its application, and which has substantive

ethical implications. I have neither the time nor space to develop these implications into a comprehensive ethical theory. Nor have I time or space to investigate the implications which the argument of this thesis has for theories of meaning, freedom of action, and other minds, or for political and social theory. These must be for another time. For the present I have had to content myself with providing an argument for the claim that, in showing that communication is necessarily a value for each subject which possesses the critical concept of thought, this thesis has laid out a transcendental foundation of ethics.

## NOTES

### Chapter One

1. Strawson, 1966. All page numbers in this section refer to this work.
2. Husserl's views changed considerably over a very long career. The views attributed to him in this section are abstracted mainly from the work of his 'middle' period. See Husserl, 1931 and 1973. A useful brief introduction to these views is Husserl, 1970(b).
3. In both kinds of experience there is some sensory material, or 'stuff', but for Husserl any meaningful talk of such stuff presupposes an understanding of the distinctions in the intentional character of experience.
4. Parallel to Strawson's denial that there can be sensible talk of things as they are in themselves, in Husserl's claim that, having dealt with the realm of sense (in his description of phenomenological essences), to ask for anything more is to ask for non-sense.
5. "Private Language Argument" is henceforth abbreviated to "PLA".
6. Kenny, 1968(b). All page numbers in this section refer to this work.
7. For Husserl's views, see note 4.
8. E.g. in Ayer, 1956, pp. 95-8.
9. cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, #243, and the discussion of Kenny below.
10. cf. Hacker's discussion of Locke, in Hacker, 1972, Chapter VIII.
11. Descartes, 1897-1910, vol. VII, p.71.
12. Stroud, 1968, p.256.
13. Rorty, 1971, p.5.
14. For example, Thomson, 1964; Rorty, 1971; Bennet, 1979; Taylor, 1978-9.
15. Rorty, 1971, p.5.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p.11.
18. Davidson, 1974 (a), p.11.
19. Rorty, 1979, p.78.
20. cf. Chapter Four, p.146-7.

21. Davidson, 1974 (a), p.7.
22. Ibid., p.16.
23. Ibid., p.20.
24. This is not an uncontroversial claim. c.f. Feyerabend, 1974. But it is not one which Davidson himself would be likely to dispute.
25. See for example, Schaper, 1974.
26. See the discussion in Henrich, 1979 on this point.
27. Davidson, 1974 (b), p.313.
28. Davidson, 1974 (a), pp. 18-19.
29. ibid., p.19.
30. Davidson, 1973, p.324.
31. Davidson, 1975, p.20.
32. ibid., p.21.
33. Davidson, 1977, p.245.
34. ibid.
35. Lewis, 1974, p.336.
36. ibid.
37. Davidson, 1974 (c), p.346.
38. c.f. Stroud, 1968; Rorty, 1971; Taylor, 1978-9.

## Chapter Two

1. Strawson, 1979, and Ayer 1979.
2. Strawson, 1979, p.44.
3. See Ayer, 1956, p.104.
4. See Ayer, 1976, p.91.
5. ibid., p.81.
6. Strawson, 1979, p.45.

7. Ayer, 1979, p.290.
8. Strawson, 1979, p.45.
9. *ibid.*, p.47.
10. e.g. Ayer, 1979, p.292.
11. Though such an implication sometimes seems to be carried, even intentionally, by Kant's language; especially in the first edition of the Critique.
12. Strawson, 1979, pp.45-6.
13. Ayer, 1976, Chapter V.
14. *ibid.*, p.106.
15. Strawson, 1966, p.19.
16. *ibid.*, p.24.
17. *ibid.*, p.25.
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*, pp. 28-9.
20. Kant, 1783, p.Bx1, note.
21. Ayer, 1976, p.81.
22. Strawson, 1966, p.111. See also Zemach, 1975, for the view that we can dispense with the self, whilst retaining the necessary self-reflexiveness of experience.
23. Strawson, 1966, p.99.
24. *ibid.*, p.29.
25. See above, p.44.
26. The subtlety of Husserl's analysis goes far beyond what is required for present purposes. Cf. Husserl, 1931, third section, fourth chapter.

### Chapter Three

1. See Appendix to Chapter Two for the use of "intentionally".
2. Talking of the meaning of a word itself raises questions, but they do not affect what I wish to say here. cf. Quine, 1951, and the discussion below.
3. See Chapter Two, p.44.
4. Discussions of such accounts can be found in Ayer, 1956, 1976; and Husserl, 1931, 1973.
5. See Quine, 1951.
6. For example, in Dummett, 1973, Ch.17.
7. See Chapter Two, pp. 46-7.
8. See especially Kripke, 1972.
9. See the discussion in Dummett, 1973, Ch.5.
10.                   10. See Ayer, 1956, and 1976.
11. I should acknowledge here that the idea of a sense-data has been put to a variety of philosophical uses. Even so, the point holds that, in any of these uses, the concept of sense-data presupposes that of experience.
12. See Ayer, 1976, p.96.
13. Ayer's notion of logical entailment accommodates the notion of an entailment founded on relationships between concepts; that is, a conceptual entailment.
14. See Ayer, 1956, p.112.
15. Compare the discussion in Wittgenstein, 1958.
16. See the last section of Chapter Five below, for further elaboration of this idea.
17. See the Excursus, above, for this parallel.
18. A similar distinction is made in Whewell, 1981.
19. Strawson, 1950.
20. Compare Cooper, 1973, p.176.
21. In Searle, 1970, pp. 62-7.

22. See Cooper, 1973, p.176.
23. By refraining from such specification at this stage in the argument, I wish to avoid giving the impression that I have in mind a directly referential theory of meaning, such as that presented in Wittgenstein, 1961. No specific theory of meaning is here implied.
24. See, for example, Russell, 1905.
25. Drawn from Whewell, 1981. pp. 590-1.
26. The argument which begins on p.70, above.
27. In saying this, I mean that the statements could have no meaning, and could not be statements about anything. I am not discussing here the idea that the empiricists' statements are about an objective reality, in which there are in fact no actually existing items.
28. Taylor, 1978-9.
29. *ibid.*, p.159.
30. See above, p.70ff, and p.74f.
31. Taylor, 1978-9, p.159.
32. *ibid.*, p.160.
33. I do not wish to imply here that I have in mind a simplistic one-to-one correlation between the concepts expressed in linguistic terms, and entities in the extra-conceptual realm. But I would argue that, even in cases such as that of the term "is", there must be a certain relationship between that term and an extra-conceptual realm, if the term is to have meaning. In such cases this link would presumably be a matter of how the term functions in a range of sentences, which themselves have a more direct relationship with the extra-conceptual realm.
34. As in Phenomenalism; or the notion that ordinary talk has the status of a fiction, or theoretical posit, by means of which we try to make sense of experience itself.
35. See above, pp.80-1, for this characterisation of the situation.
36. The position is in fact more complex than as I have described it here. See below, pp.125ff. for further elaboration.
37. See the discussion of the First Objection, above.



38. In talking of "nothing" here, I should like to keep clear of the Heideggerian connotations which, largely through ignorance, have come to be associated with such talk. I am concerned here only with what is being said in utterances in which this term is used.
39. The concepts envisaged here include, for example, concepts of ordinary material objects such as cats and tables.
40. See above, p.60ff, for the argument for this claim.
41. See the Second Objection, above, p.66.
42. Above, p.90.
43. See the argument of Chapter Two, above.
44. Gellner, 1963.
45. See Cooper, 1973, p.66.
46. See below, pp.125ff, for further elaboration of the temporal nature of this relationship.
47. See below, p.125ff. for the relationship between logical and temporal priorities in this context.
48. I do not intend to push this analogy too far, only to use it insofar as it can be helpful.
49. A note on terminology: I use the term "registration" or "grasp" rather than "understanding" or "conception" here, in order to avoid the implication carried by the two latter terms that concepts are therein employed. To talk of a non-conceptual understanding, would seem to be a contradiction in terms. "Registration" is used here primarily as a term for a non-conceptual awareness, or grasp, of something.
50. In fact, it is a picture of language far closer to that presented in Heidegger, 1962.
51. See Heidegger, 1962.

## Chapter Four

1. See Chapter Two above.
2. See, for example, Husserl, 1973, pp.18-21
3. cf Kant, 1933, A737/B765; and Taylor, 1979-80, p.160
4. The objection is included in Descartes, 1969, Vo. II, p.62. Pears considers the issue in Pears, 1979.
5. See, for example, Husserl, 1931, Second Section, Third Chapter.
6. Though see above, p.125-8, for an account of the way experience is primarily grasped as temporally displaced from the present.
7. See, for example, Ayer, 1979, p.285-9, where he offers a careful reply to Pears.
8. See Taylor, 1978-9, p.160.
9. See Russell, 1961, p.550.
10. See Frege, 1977, p.17.
11. *ibid.*, p.16.
12. *ibid.*, p 4-5.
13. *ibid.*, p.17.
14. Furthermore, if truth is timeless, then it may seem that the meaning-entities to which it is ascribed must also be timeless. Thus if it is timelessly true that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, then it may seem that the entity to which truth is ascribed (the thought that Caesar crossed the Rubicon) must also be timeless.
15. Frege makes a distinction between the two which is not important for our purposes. See Frege, 1977, p.7.
16. See for example, Stroud, 1968, p.255.
17. It may be that instead of the term "content" the term "'meaning'" would be less misleading here, as long as it is taken to be the equivalent for a thought/doubt of a sentence having meaning.
18. For this argument see Chapter Three above, pp.70-1. For the use of the term "'semantic'" to parallel for concepts the notion of a semantic link between words and the world which makes meaning possible, see above pp.71-2.
19. See Chapter Three, pp.70-1.
20. For this argument see "The Recursive Paradigm Case Argument," above, pp.102-5.

21. Chapter Three, passim.
22. See above, pp.134-8.
23. Hegel, 1977, p.47. (First pages of the Introduction.)
24. See Chapter Two, above, pp.40-6.
25. Taylor, 1978-9, p.159.
26. Compare the argument concerning the required concept of experience, which occupied Chapter Two.
27. See Chapter Two, above, pp.42-4.
28. Or, in terms of thought, an alternative account of that in relation with which thought has content, or 'meaning'.
29. Although the connection between empiricism and moral scepticism is close in writers in the Humean tradition.
30. Hegel, 1977, pp.46-7.
31. For the notion of self-formation in Hegel, see, for example, Taylor, 1975, Part Two.
32. Above, p.145.
33. Husserl's notion of hyle seems more or less equivalent to Ayer's notion of sense-contents, here.
34. For page references to the parallel stages in Chapter Three, see table of contents.
35. cf. Blanshard, 1939, Vol.II, Ch.25-7.
36. For example, Neurath, 1932/3.
37. It is not my claim to have dealt in this section adequately with the coherence theory of truth, but only to see why one variant of it cannot work. For a fuller account, see Rescher, 1973.
38. For this use of the phrase "(presumed) awareness," see Chapter Three, above, p.86.
39. cf. the discussion of Strawson in Chapter Two above, pp.40-6.
40. As in Chapter Three, I wish to avoid any unwelcome Heideggerian overtones concerning the use of the term "nothing", here. cf. Chapter Three, note 38.
41. We might argue here that both features being discussed here could be brought together under one complex concept; that of nothing, over and above thought, in the objective world. In any event, the concept of thought must clearly be presupposed by the use of such a concept.

42. Above, p.162.
43. *ibid.*
44. *ibid.*, pp.160-1.
45. For the relationship between logical and temporal priorities in this kind of situation, see Chapter Three, above, pp.125-8.
46. See above, pp.134-8.
47. For the background to this argument, see the last section of Chapter Three, above, pp.107-128

### Chapter Five

1. For this process, see Chapter Four, above, pp.134-8.
2. Descartes, 1969, vol.I, p.101
3. For evidence of its plausibility, see Kenny, 1968(a), Ch.3.
4. *ibid.*, p.62.
5. Kant, 1933, A363-4.
6. Hume, 1888, p.252.
7. *ibid.*, p.634.
8. Husserl, 1970 (a), p.549.
9. *ibid.*, p.562.
10. *ibid.*, p.549.
11. Husserl, 1973, p.21.
12. Husserl, 1970(b), p.22.
13. Husserl, 1931, p.136.
14. *ibid.*, p.172.
15. For Sartre's position, see Sartre, 1957(b), p.97.
16. For example, Husserl, 1931, pp.231-2.
17. For attempts to unravel Husserl's theory of the subject, see Fink, 1970; Ricoeur, 1967; and Berger, 1972.
18. Although this move is chronologically inappropriate, it is justified in view of the fact that Husserl's views of the subject remain, in an important sense, pre-Kantian. I shall not develop this remark here.
19. Kant, 1933, B75.

20. Strawson, 1966. I use Strawson rather than Kant himself here, as a way of avoiding some problems of textual interpretation and retaining the cutting edge of Kant's argument. I recognise that many Kantian scholars regard Strawson's view of Kant as a limited one.
21. *ibid.*, pp.100-1.
22. *ibid.*, p.100. For problems with the notion of a component of recognition, see Rorty, 1970.
23. *ibid.*, p.101.
24. *ibid.*, pp.110-1.
25. *ibid.*, p.107.
26. *ibid.*, p.111.
27. Zemach, 1975.
28. cf. the discussion in Mehta, 1971, p.22.
29. see Sartre, 1957(a), Ch.1.
30. McGinn, 1982, p.13.
31. For the notions of noema and noesis, see Husserl, 1931, Third Section, Third Chapter.
32. It might seem that we have not paid sufficient attention to the notion of the mental in this discussion. Without offering an argument here, I will say that this is because this notion would need to be explained with reference to the concept of thinking. It cannot be itself used to explain the concept of thinking.
33. Davidson, 1975, p.9.
34. For the notion of implicit concepts, or understanding, see Chapter Two, above, pp.34-6.
35. For arguments to this effect, see McGinn, 1982, pp.60 ff.
36. From this conceptual vantage-point, we may feel happier with the term "expression". This term expresses our understanding of the relation between language and thought; the term "embodiment" expresses the strategic requirements of the present philosophical approach.
37. In Chapters Three and Four.
38. See Saussure, 1974.
39. Above, pp.212-3.
40. Wittgenstein, 1953, # 334.
41. *ibid.*, # 335.

42. Further developments of this notion can be found in Heidegger, 1962; and Merleau-Ponty, 1962.
43. cf. McGinn, 1982, pp.60 ff.

## Chapter Six

1. In Chapter Five.
2. Chapter Five, above, p.218.
3. See the discussion in Chapter Five, pp.226-232.
4. See the discussion in Chapter Four, above, pp.152-180.
5. Wittgenstein, 1953, ~~#~~ 258.
6. Chapter Four, above, p.171.
7. For this argument, see above pp.171-180.
8. *ibid.*, pp.171-5.
9. Wittgenstein, 1953, ~~#~~ 199.
10. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 201.
11. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 198.
12. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 201.
13. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 202.
14. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 199.
15. *ibid.*, ~~#~~ 241.
16. I would agree that some degree of coincidence between the different subjects in the way in which they express their thoughts is necessary here. My point is that agreement in the use of language cannot consist in this alone.
17. cf. the argument in Chapter Three, pp.122-8.
18. Again, I would agree that there is some kind of causal relationship describable here. The point is that the agreement in the use of language cannot be understood in terms of causal relationships alone.
19. I do not here need to make any distinctions between these concepts (though there are, of course, distinctions to be made which are important in other contexts).
20. See, for example, Lewis 1974; and Davidson 1973.
21. See note 20.
22. See above, p254.

23. cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, ~~#~~242.
24. Again, I would agree that such empirical regularities are indeed a necessary condition of expressive harmony, The point is that communication cannot consist in such regularities alone.

### Chapter Seven

1. See above, pp.263-278.
2. Sartre, 1957(b), p.49.
3. I do not agree here that communication must be a value for all thinking subjects, since the argument of Chapter Five allowed for the possibility of beings which think but do not communicate.
4. cf. Chapter Five, above, pp.226-232.
5. I should say here that I do not regard the introduction of the term "moral" into the argument as a matter of great import. This will become clear in the following discussion - cf.below, pp.313-322.
6. See below, pp.313-322.
7. Mackie, 1977, pp.30-36.
8. See Hare, 1964.
9. See Foot, 1978, especially Ch.XI.
10. In this discussion, as in others in this chapter, I have benefited from Nagel, 1970.
11. See above, pp.241-244.

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